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Creating Style and Extending Boundaries: An Analysis of Three Women in Rock

by

Rachelle Lynn Ventura

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Rachelle Ventura

5475 N. Angus #104
Fresno, California 93710

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Creating Style and Extending Boundaries: An Analysis of Three Women in Rock" submitted by Rachelle Lynn Ventura in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music in Musicology.

Dr. Adam Krims

Dr. Regula Qureshi

Dr. Colleen Skidmore

Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of the music of three women in rock music: Sarah McLachlan, Sheryl Crow, and Sinead O'Connor. The discussion centers on how each of these artists has created a distinctive style, carving a particular niche in the popular music market in the 1990s. Each artist finds ways of articulating style which enables successful mediation with her audience.

The analysis of each artist's music involves many components. The artist's place in the history of rock, specifically as a woman, is traced. The visual constructs surrounding the artist are also described, including album design, promotional material, as well as the artist's personal appearance and performance gestures. Intertwined with an artist's image is the ideology the artist perpetuates and which connects at various levels with her audience. The analysis centers on the actual acoustic properties of the music, including harmonic and melodic aspects, as well as instrumentation and vocal style. The audience and media coverage of each artist is also dealt with to find some ways of understanding how the artist is received and how she is able to communicate meaningfully.

Throughout the paper, suggestions are given as to how each female artist extends notions of what is considered acceptable discourse in rock, whether this is done through lyrics, formal structures, or a particular ideology.

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I. Introduction

Goals of this paper

The intent of this study is two-fold: first, it aims to illuminate how three female artists in rock music successfully articulate style; secondly, to show how the adoption of a particular style creates a distinctive place in rock music for each of the women, and encourages rock music to engage in new discourses in the 1990s. The paper will focus on an analysis of the music of Sarah MacLachlan, Sheryl Crow and Sinead O'Connor (See Appendix). These artists have all achieved success as measured by record sales, radio play, and concert appearances. Each artist, however, has a distinctive musical style and articulates her lyrical content differently. I am interested in how each artist has found her own niche in popular music and more broadly, in popular culture, through three areas: public image and identity that has been created, relevance of lyrics which articulate a particular way of being in the world, and aural properties, which constitute the primary medium through which the artist communicates to her audience. All of these aspects meld to create an artist's particular "style", which gives her both an identity and a point of connection with her audience.

Each of the artists in this study perpetuates a particular ideology which arises partly out of aesthetic properties and partly out of the artist's political and social expressions, lyrically and otherwise. It is the unique way in which each artist articulates this ideology, along with a musical aesthetic, which has brought this music into public acceptance. The listener participates in the music in either physical, cognitive, or emotional way – often a combination of all three (Lull 1992:19) – and becomes part of the process of articulation by creating and appropriating meaning(s).

The success of the three artists (which, as is the case throughout the popular music industry, is intrinsically linked to market strategies) is their ability to make points of connection with and articulate meaning to an audience. The concept of articulation I take from Middleton (1990), Grossberg (1992), and Negus (1996). As Negus urges,

studying popular music should "entail examining processes of articulation in which particular sounds have to seek out, be sought by and connect with particular audiences" (Negus 1996: 134). Through a complex "web of mediated connections", "the meaning of music" arises out of a process wherein "the performer, industry and audience 'articulate' with each other and with the surrounding culture and social-political system" (Negus 1996: 135).

It is the artist's creation and adoption of a particular style that sets the process of articulation in motion.[1] By style, I am not referring solely to the musical processes themselves, but as Stan Hawkins states "recogniz[ing] the interrelationships that exist between musical structures, lyrical connotations and the visual and performance narratives within a given cultural context" (Hawkins 1996: 21).

While the project on which Hawkins based this assumption was the analysis of one song performed by one artist in the context of music video, I would like to extend this to an analysis of an entire repertoire of an artist, including all solo recordings, performance gestures as seen in live performances, lyrics, personal image -- which includes political and social stances -- and other visual constructs associated with the artist. All these factors, to varying degrees in different artists, enable musicians to "'speak' to their audiences" (Lull 1992: 2) and enable listeners to construct meaning.

The aim of this paper, therefore, is to determine how these three female artists successfully articulate style. An artist's style is made unique by a combination of factors such as image and ideology; and by aural components including harmonic and melodic aspects, as well as the particular use of the voice and instrumentation. I will show how these elements of style are worked out, and will give some instances of where style is successful in communicating meaning to an audience. I will also show throughout the paper how gender influences particular articulations of each woman's music and provides the unifying force for all three artists to stretch and redefine what are considered to be acceptable boundaries for rock music.

Discussion of style: understanding the present via the past

In order to understand how style is created, we must first visit the past. The rock audience is aware of rock music's history at various levels. Readers of popular music magazines, such as *Rolling Stone* or *Spin*, are constantly reminded of who has come before and the stylistic practices that are being drawn upon. Reviews of new music are riddled with references to other artists in order to give the reader some point of aural-memory reference. These reviews also confirm the tendency of rock journalism to define musicians by characteristics of other artists' styles or by other popular musical genres, such as blues, hip-hop, reggae, and folk which are defined by rather ambiguous parameters. Relating music to a particular tradition or "sound" (such as the "Seattle grunge sound") offers the reader of rock journalism and the listener of popular music a starting point for positioning him/herself in relation to the music.

A recent issue of *Rolling Stone* gives examples of how the journalist defines the present within an historical context. On a review of the album *So much for the Afterglow* by the band Everclear, the reviewer begins by referring to "Saint Cobain" (the late Kurt Cobain of the band Nirvana), whom he accuses of instigating "a host of bands" which are "still churning out chunky punk-metal riffs and strained, angsty poetry" (Hoskyns 1997: 104). This "neo-Nirvana" band has been relegated to the line of grunge metal, which has its roots in punk music. Unfortunately for Everclear, the reviewer strongly insinuates this sound has lost its relevance, although "a host of sulking adolescents wearing flaky nail polish are still buying it" (Hoskyns 1997: 104).

A review of The Dandy Warhols brings an even greater barrage of associations. Their music is described as "hypnotically droning riff[s] delivered in waves of fuzz guitar and garage-band keyboards that recall everything from the Seeds and the Velvets to Stereolab and Spiritualized. This is post-Jesus and Mary Chain pop..." One of their songs is described as being "Papas Fritas-meet-the-B-52's"; another could be "an acid-house remix of ZZ Top's 'Legs'" (Hoskyns 1997: 123).

Yet one more example of rock journalism's obsession with tracing musical referents is found in the review of Primal Scream's *Vanishing Point*. Here the reviewer claims that:

> "where Beck digs Bob Dylan and the Beasties, Primal Scream leadman, Bobby Gillespie looked to Al Green and the Stones. Those influences dominated Primal Scream's 1994 retro-jammy *Give Out but Don't Give Up* so much that the album suggested a Brit Black Crowes." (Cohen 1997: 122)

Given rock journalism's concern for its music's history as well as the fact that an individual listener brings past listening and past associations to his/her listening experience, it is appropriate to examine the place of McLachlan, Crow, and O'Connor in the history of rock. Other important reasons to investigate these artists' place in rock's history are to question why these women have succeeded, given the fact that the rock music scene has been male-dominated (a subject I will be addressing) and how their positions are unique within rock music. We will examine elements of their individual styles and general musical influences -- some acknowledged by the artists themselves, some attributed by rock critics, and others personal observations. This will lead to questions on the location of these artists within the rock music canon. The canon encompasses the actual history of rock music, whether it be that music which is perpetuated through media, or that which is revealed through other artists to be influential. A broader issue that arises from all these ideas is how rock music itself is defined.

What is rock?

The use of the word "canon" raises questions of what constitutes rock as a descriptive category. Following Keith Negus' *Popular Music in Theory: An Introduction* (1996), which contains a survey of the work of popular music scholars on

this very issue, one discovers that rock can be broadly or narrowly defined, depending on whom one reads. Simon Frith understands rock to belong to a specific historical period, 1956 - 1976 (Negus 1996: 162). This view is based on the premise that the music industry was re-organizing itself around the new consumer - youth (Negus 1996: 148). Frith also proposes that rock is defined by a particular ideology on which its practices are based. These practices are described in his book *Sound Effects* (1981) as the notion of the rock "career" based on years of learning, an "expression of specific generational sentiments and feelings", and the existence of a "rock community" which linked performers and audiences (Negus 1996: 149). For Frith, rock ended when it became coopted by the industry, a point which punk rock revealed by "challenging, deconstructing and exposing the mythologies of rock" (Negus 1996: 151).

Ian Chambers further claims that punk rock not only instigated the death of rock, but that it "broke the sequential history of pop" by causing a new diversity, a "proliferation of the margins" (Negus 1996: 151). The music market was now reorganized around the "commodified, contrived and free market pluralism" into which an older rock audience and generation of musicians are now playing (Negus 1996: 151).

Contrary to Chambers' claims, I would argue that the punk movement did not cause the death of rock music. Instead it brought about a new diversity and fluidity of boundaries. Since its inception, punk music has itself changed and interacted with mainstream rock music, providing rock with new directions. For example, the interaction of punk and heavy metal (along with other influences, such as the Beatles) has formed grunge music. The early Police consciously melded punk, reggae, and rock.[2] Punk's effects can also be seen in early U2 with their combination of harsh tone, simple instrumentation, social criticism, and lack of instrumental expertise.

Rock's interaction with other musical styles is also prevalent. Rock bands such as U2 and Smashing Pumpkins draw on electronica and the Stone Temple Pilots draw from grunge, lounge music and Beatlesque pop. The hip-hop beat has influenced

virtually all aspects of current rock music from Suzanne Vega to the Rolling Stones. As Negus argues, rock music is engaged in dialogue both with its various pasts and with other styles of music (Negus 1996: 162-63).

This is not to suggest that rock music does not have defining borders, but that these borders are constantly being pushed against and stretched; at times, they appear hazy and indistinct, and sometimes they are even redefined. The danger exists that rock's definitions can be conceived of as so broad as to render any attempt to come to terms with any aural-musical characteristics essentially futile. Lawrence Grossberg implies that musical parameters are unnecessary and irrelevant, arguing that the essential element of rock is its articulations within "broader social and political processes in the United States" (Negus 1996: 161). While this may in some ways be true, rock can be partly defined apart from its United States context, its largest but not sole market. Rock is also defined by non-American historical context -- in Canada, Europe, or anywhere rock music is made or has an audience. Rock can also be defined according to certain musical characteristics. In addition, Grossberg fails to recognize those involved in the music industry (including audience) who constantly make decisions regarding what does or does not constitute rock.

There are, in fact, boundaries within which rock music falls. As Allan Moore suggests, rock is a "stylistic practice", the characteristics of which he discusses in *Rock: the Primary Text* (1993). The first characteristic Moore identifies is the stratification of sound into four layers: an explicit rhythmic layer, the lowest frequencies, the melody, and the harmonic filler (Moore 1993: 31). Characteristic instrumentation of rock music is the bass guitar, guitar, and drum kit. Other instruments are "imported", particularly the piano and/or keyboards, to achieve particular effects or sounds (Moore 1993: 38).

The principle of pattern repetition is another fundamental characteristic of rock which is laid down by the standard rock beat and is evident at the level of small melodic and rhythmic cells, or harmonic patterns, or at the level of the phrase or larger (Moore 1993: 35). Moore states that almost all rock music organizes beats in groups of four

(yielding a 4/4 time signature). Phrases are also grouped in fours (Moore 1993: 39). The formal divisions which a rock song conventionally employs are: introduction, verse, refrain, bridge, solo (break), and coda (Moore 1993: 47).

Although a more thorough look at Moore's discussion is suggested, these are some of the most important characteristics of rock music. It is important to heed Moore's caution that none of these characteristics is a prerequisite for rock. They form a central core to which other characteristics can be added to or for which they may act as substitutes. This definition of rock is still one, however, which allows for fluid boundaries, room for change, and even transformation as it interacts with other musical genres. As Negus suggests:

> "A focus on the stylistic practices of rock and how these change and intersect with other styles might provide a way of studying how different participants in the mediations of music making become involved in organizing musical boundaries – how musicians, industry workers, journalists, audiences and academics are involved in drawing boundaries around what is and is not rock." (Negus 1996: 162).

The alignment of the music of McLachlan, Crow, and O'Connor with the characteristics that make up the stylistic practices which Moore uses to define rock, as well as the artists' portrayal and categorization by the media, places their music within the category of rock. Once that is understood, one can discuss placement of these artists within rock music. The primary focus of this paper is to discuss which factors are most prominent in constituting the individual musical styles of these musicians. These styles and the means of articulating them position the work of these artists within the arena of rock music, which, in a broader sense, is a stylistic practice itself. All three women engage in dialogues with the past and show points of intersection with musical styles other than rock. What is even more interesting is the fact that all of the artists push the boundaries, in varying degrees, of what is considered rock according to sonic, structural, and/or ideological criteria.

History of women in rock

One of the central factors of a musician's unique style and distinctive ideology, which is integral in creating strategies for redefining rock, is the artist's gender. A feminist-informed account of how this study's three artists fits into the popular music canon, and how each presents the various aspects of her music, is useful in understanding these artists, who work within, and perpetuate their own "brands" of, feminism.

In light of the importance of canon and the significance of gender in rock music, this study will look at how three female artists contribute to an evolving picture of women in rock. Touted by some to be only a passing phenomenon, the current "Women-in-Rock" movement has a history, with roots in rock's beginnings.

The fact that the artists in this study are all women is significant. The face of rock is changing, with many more female artists in rock music than ever before. This is verified by a comparison of the ratio of women to men on the current Top 40 Billboard charts to some of fifteen or more years ago. This "phenomenon" has not been lost on the media. As early as 1980, a report on women in rock in *New Musical Express* (Pearson 1980) emerged as one of the first articles to recognize the growing number of women in the male-dominated rock music scene.

It was not the numbers exactly, but the new role that women occupied, which attracted attention. No longer merely pretty vocalists covering other artists' songs, women were beginning to take greater control of their material and production -- playing their own instruments and becoming more aggressive in their musical sound through an electric guitar-based sound, driving rhythms, and harsher vocals and performance.[3] The English bands interviewed in Pearson's article (the Slits, The Raincoats, The Au Pairs, The Mo-dettes, and Girlschool) have had some success in the alternative rock scene and have since retained a cult following, but they are more notable for their influence and role-modeling for other female bands than for their

exposure to a mainstream audience.

Bands such as the ones above and other female bands in North America slowly began to present an alternative role for women in popular music as writers and instrumentalists. They expanded on the traditional predominance of women as singers who sang other's songs, and whose sound was molded by their producers, particularly in dance pop (Janet Jackson, Paula Abdul) and the new rhythm and blues or soul music (Whitney Houston). In 1988, the media brought attention to a new "explosion" of women onto the mainstream pop/rock charts and airwaves. The popularity of rock artists with a folk influence such as Suzanne Vega, Tracy Chapman, and Michelle Shocked ushered in a new era for women in rock, in which female artists were given more serious consideration as composers and instrumentalists.

Although the acceptance of women as songwriters in the gentler folk medium can be seen throughout popular music's history, from Peggy Seeger to Joni Mitchell, women have had a much more difficult time establishing themselves as instrumentalists, songwriters, and singers in blues and rock music.[4] Many women who did occupy a place in these forms have not been given the recognition they deserve by the media (such as guitarist Bonnie Raitt). Consequently, there has been an influx of "herstories" of rock music which seek to rewrite rock history with the purpose of positioning women within a tradition from which they have been either marginalized or excluded (See O'Brien 1995, Stewart and Garratt 1984, Gaar 1992, and Hoke 1991: 281).

In her introduction to *Women, Sex and Rock 'N' Roll: In their own words* (1994), Liz Evans outlines how some female rock artists have broken down stereotypes and taken control of their identities. There are numerous ways in which this has been accomplished. Some female artists have rebelled against traditional female roles in rock and others have adopted them in order to subvert them. The most obvious form of rebellion against female stereotypes is where women have adopted a more traditionally masculine stance. Women who have fronted a male band with an electric guitar include

Chrissie Hynde and The Pretenders, Joan Jett and The Blackhearts (Joan Jett also fronted an all-female band, The Runaways), Suzi Quatro, and Ann and Nancy Wilson of Heart. Not only did these women dress the part – boots and black leather – but the spectacle of a woman playing an electric guitar, an instrument traditionally seen as male domain, challenged traditional assumptions about women as musicians. Women such as Carole King could play piano and keyboards or like Joni Mitchell, strum an acoustic guitar, but one rarely saw women who aggressively used the electric guitar.

Liz Evans also details the subversion of several stereotypes. The representation of women as "femme fatales" or "dizzy sex queens" was one which Janis Joplin rebelled against in the late 1960s with her "feisty, impassioned performances" highlighting her screechy, raucous voice, as well as her well-known penchant for taking drugs and drinking as "hard as the boys" (Evans 1994: v). Patti Smith fulfilled the punk rock mandate of subversion by breaking down gender roles, presenting a "severely confrontational" androgynous image as well as exploring and stretching the boundaries of rock form by mixing her poetry with instrumentation and forms which were often improvisational and chaotic in nature, sometimes to the extent of nihilism (Evans 1994: v). Siouxsie Sioux refused any fixed representation with her ever-changing adornments and masks. Annie Lennox and Madonna challenged traditional feminine stereotypes by either cross-dressing or flaunting female stereotypes in a satirical manner.

Other women have managed to create strong, independent careers, consciously working from their own understanding of themselves as women. Joni Mitchell, an artist who has had much influence in rock as well as folk music, has not been afraid to deal with the "contradictions and complexities of irrational female emotion" (Evans 1994: v). Kate Bush has developed an uncompromisingly unique style, using themes from fairytales and other forms of fantasy literature. She has maintained strict control over the production and creation of her work, building her own studio and employing her family, refusing to be restricted by the corporate music industry, even while entering into it to build her success.

These women are mentioned because they have been exceptions to the rule; they go beyond traditional roles and expectations. Thus, they have served as role models, empowering other women, including the women presented here, to develop their own style and identity. Many female artists name other female musicians as primary influences and role models (Klam 1997: 129, Dunn 1997: 137) and attest to the fact that the very presence of senior female rock artists provides a source of encouragement for themselves.

Besides instances of specific women, other movements also bear some responsibility for the growing number of women in rock. The feminist movement, which came to full force in the 1970s, has acted as a "major route into music making, providing the opportunity, motivation and material resources for women's participation" (Bayton 1993: 177). Its empowering ideology has challenged women to find careers in the music business as well as the general business world. It spawned the establishment of Olivia and Redwood Records, two record companies which were owned, managed, and run by women, and which supported solely female artists. The networking surrounding these companies resulted in the formation of "women only" festivals, workshops and courses, which offered women a non-threatening environment in which to learn to play instruments, and provided knowledge in production, engineering, and group management. While most of the music that came out of this scene did not cross over to the mainstream (Helen Reddy's feminist anthem "I am Woman" being a notable exception), the formation of female support systems within the music industry was a product of a time in which women were ready to come into their own.

The punk movement has been noted by many to be especially conducive to the acceptance of women. The movement's "do-it-yourself" attitude broke down the mysticism that surrounded playing the guitar, electric bass, and drums and initiative was emphasized over technique (Gaar 1992: 230). The image presented tended to be more androgynous as conventional sexual poses were deemed "uncool", with "conventional

female sex objects particularly suspect" (Dibbell 1997: 280).[5] A host of women made their appearance on the punk scene, with Siouxsie Sioux and Patti Smith emerging as perhaps the most influential.

Although there have been relatively few women in rock in the 70s and 80s, the latter decade saw the stardom of several women in pop music -- Cyndi Lauper, Madonna, Janet Jackson, Whitney Houston, and the re-emergence of Tina Turner. Most of these women still sang others' music, however, and often had little control of production. In the last decade there has been a large number of women on the charts: women who are writing their own material, playing their own instruments, and taking control of the overall production. The present acceptance of women in rock owes much to previous female artists who have provided strong role models and broken down gender barriers.

At present, "women in rock" seems to have maintained its novelty status even though the "phenomenon" has been recognized for the past two decades. *Rolling Stone* decided to dedicate its thirtieth anniversary issue (Nov.13, 1997) to "Women of Rock", complete with twenty-eight interviews with female artists, as well as with women who work behind the scenes in the music business. It is ironic that though the issue was meant as a celebration of women in rock, the effects of sexism still lurk beneath its title. The notion that rock continues to be a male domain in which women are alien is not lost on several of the interviewees. As Sheryl Crow states, "As long as this women-in-rock movement is treated as a novelty, we're still looking at it as something that's not here to stay" (Hamilton 1997: 108). And one of punk music's icons, Patti Smith, declined to do an interview, saying that "a special issue on women 'genderizes' women" (Wenner 1997: 31). It is unfortunate that this anniversary issue of *Rolling Stone* carries on rock journalism's tendency of limiting the topics of discussion by asking the twenty-eight artists of various styles and backgrounds questions mostly of gender and its effect on their careers. This tendency is evident in the bulk of new readings in women-focused rock history which have dealt primarily with questions of

why women have been largely excluded from the mainstream and how they have worked to overcome it. (See Evans 1994, Pearson 1980, Raphael 1995, Stewart 1984, and Whitman 1981.) While these have been and continue to be important issues, I do not wish to focus on how the women in this paper have come to achieve success "despite" their gender. The fact that female rock artists have made so many inroads in the past two decades has made it easier for the women in this study to do what they choose. Certainly each woman works from a gendered position, but each is able to use her gender to her advantage. I am interested in the more general question of how these artists have created a niche for themselves in the market in a variety of ways, acknowledging that gender plays a crucial role in each woman's creation of a distinctive style.

As I have already suggested, most of the authors on women in rock have written from a feminist framework. Notions of the relation of gender and power in the music industry were primary motivators in giving written account of the interviews and information relayed by female artists. Moving from a position of recognizing the progress women have made in the music industry, *Trouble Girls* (O'Dair 1997) offers a significantly broader scope. The most recent of the "herstories" to date, the book surveys the history of women in rock by giving more detailed account of the actual musical processes, and by giving some analysis of the relation between the artists and their impact on popular culture, while tracing a musical lineage that necessarily includes both female and male musicians. The book does revert to the tendency to categorize, placing artists according to stylistic traits and musical roots. While this may not be entirely commendable, it is helpful in understanding how the women in this thesis are perceived by a small yet influential portion of their audience.

The editor of *Trouble Girls* places MacLachlan, Crow, and O'Connor under the broad category of "Divas and B-Girls", that is, those who have "realized their artistic aspirations in conjunction with commercial success by *carving out new niches or taking over whole genres*" (emphasis added), following the tradition of 1970's

singer-songwriters such as Stevie Nicks and Kate Bush. McLachlan is positioned within the "long line of bohemian iconoclasts" – that is, female artists who are both "womanly and arrogant, true rock goddesses who [mythologize] themselves as vaingloriously as men" do (Powers 1997: 326). Although their artistic styles vary widely, the commonality between these artists is that they "strive to discover how women's wisdom -- and the feminine legacy that equality is, to some extent, making obsolete -- can feed and be fed by rock's energy" (Powers 1997: 326). As we shall see, McLachlan perpetuates an earth goddess mythology and image through her music.

Another sub-category of "divas" is the singer-songwriter, although this is a characteristic of the previous group of "rock goddesses" as well. What makes these artists distinct from the goddesses is that they come down to the level of their audience, sharing "their social and political views and even intimate aspects of their personal lives with fans", thus expanding on "an already rich history of women as confessional writers and performers" (Gardner 97: 360). Drawing on artists as varied as Joni Mitchell, Janis Joplin, Bruce Springsteen, and Led Zeppelin, these woman have created a sound which makes each fresh and unique (Gardner 97: 360). As we shall see, Sheryl Crow does not fit easily within this lineage as a confessional songwriter, but stylistically she draws from mostly male musicians, while adding a female perspective.

Although Sinead O'Connor fits within the previous category as a confessional songwriter, the editor of *Trouble Girls* decided to not place her there, giving O'Connor an entire chapter to herself. Indeed, O'Connor's stylistic traits are taken from too wide a spectrum to enable categorization. It is difficult to confine her to general characteristics; she entwines her music, image, and personal life so closely with her political and social views that her position is unique.

The aim of this paper is not merely to place these artists within a history of stylistic practice, but to understand how they have achieved successes. As outlined in the introduction, successful mediation is accomplished through the creation of a distinctive style. It is the analysis of the styles of McLachlan, Crow, and O'Connor to

which the discussion will now turn.

My analysis will first position each artist within the rock canon which is informed, in part, by *Trouble Girls*. I will then look at the lyrical content, musical processes, vocal style, and iconography which contribute to the creation of style by all three artists. Following this, I will give some attention to performance gesture. Finally, I will turn to audience, discussing how fans and the media create discourses about the artists which align with the identity and ideologies perpetuated by the artists.

The importance of image

There are more than acoustic aspects which make up an artist's music. A pop star's image has always been important in marketing strategies, and in giving the audience a visual point of reference to the artist (among other things). The use of "image" in this context is described as comprising attitude, appearance, performance gestures, and any other ways of visually packaging an artist.

It is not difficult to find many cases of publicists and/or artists who create and use an image they think will sell. Take for example, the ever-changing persona of Madonna, the outrageous use of make-up and masquerade in Kiss, or the second-hand-clothes-shop look of Cyndi Lauper. These examples display some of the more obvious attempts to create image. Other images may be less obviously constructed but are equally important. Even a deliberate attempt not to construct an image, as exemplified in Tracy Chapman, exudes an aura of anti-commercialism which is just as enticing as an image of authenticity as those of more flamboyant personalities.

Mainstream popular music has always been intricately connected to image which manifests itself visually, a phenomenan observed by popular press and journalism. It has been recognized at least as early as Elvis Presley, whose actions, appearance and attitude combined to create an image which drew points of connection with his audience. Though Elvis's image evoked both negative and positive responses,

it had a great deal to do with his success. The "official Elvis" is a visual portrait of "tireless twitching and suggestive pelvic action" (Guralnick 1980: 21), exuding a sexual energy which restricted his visual appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show to only above-the-waist views.

Image played an important role for The Beatles from the onset of their commercial success. They presented an idealized image of working-class youth, "loose and free, not afraid to snub pretension", leveling criticisms at established society, not as much through words as through "an aura of impatience with convention and evident satisfaction with wealth and fame, ...expressed in their carefully chosen styles of bizarre clothes" (Gillett 1987: 265). It was a mixture of sound and image which made the successes of groups coming out of the rhythm and blues scene in the 1960s (Rolling Stones, The Who, The Kinks, etc.). These groups "exuded a more defiant spirit, expressed in snarling vocals, raucous guitars, and baleful glares at photographers" (Gillett 1987: 267) not to mention the long hair and careful use of fashion. These visual aspects worked in a variety of ways, including creating subcultures; acting as a means of expressing rebellion against societal boundaries which dictated what was considered acceptable modes of behavior and dress; and acting out aggression and even androgyny.

Consumers of popular culture demonstrate the connections that image makes with their everyday lives. The ways in which fans identify with an artist manifest themselves in a multitude of ways, from copying hairstyles and fashion, to wearing T-shirts of the artist, to identifying themselves with causes with which the artist identifies him/herself.

The rock audience has access to a variety of visual constructs that are associated with an artist. The first point of contact is usually the art and/or photographs of the band or artist featured on a recording. Promotional photographs and other artwork associated with the artist can be seen in magazines, newspapers, and record stores. Live appearances in concert and interviews, both in person and in the press, are

other important sites of mediating image. With the advent of music video and MTV, popular music is becoming increasingly more visual, providing valuable opportunities to promote an artist via image.

Image can also be a site of exploitation. This has often led to the playing up of "sex appeal" for female artists in particular. (Take a look at Mariah Carey's video for the song "Butterfly" as an example.) This has been a source of contention for decades for those who claim this to be an objectification of women. I will discuss how a creative re-working of the relation between gender and image figures positively into the development of style and identity for the artists in this study.

One problem that arises out of a discussion of image is that it is difficult if not impossible to differentiate the artist's image from the artist herself. How much of that image is truly coming from the artist as a reflection of the artist, and how much is simply what the artist wants projected? Furthermore, how much of the image projected is influenced or even directly manipulated by those involved in the music industry, such as managers, record companies, and publicists? These are questions which need to be kept at the forefront of the reader/listener/viewer's mind when describing and evaluating image projection.

Audience reception

The artist is only part of the complex equation that is involved in the existence and mediation of rock music. Musical experience in any form exists as social fact and is socially determined by various factors (Silbermann 1977: 83). Entering into the equation is the music industry, which includes managers, record companies, technologies, and other elements. For the scope of this paper, I would like to touch on the receptors of the musical product, that is, the audience, which includes fans, rock journalists, and scholars.

The rock music audience plays a crucial role in the production of meaning. As

rock is a form of mass communication, we must seek to understand how and what is being communicated and what meanings are constructed by the listener. As Grossberg points out, "recent work in communication theory has attempted to give both the *message* and the *audience* a more active role in the processes of meaning construction and ideology" (Grossberg 1992: 155). The problem, however, lies in describing the exact nature of the relationship between the two. The two elements are in a state of constant tension. On one hand, the individual fans respond as socialized beings, and as such, "stand in the positions that the music makes available to" them (Grossberg 1992: 155). On the other hand, fans interpret texts in such a way as to fit their own experiences, which are as varied as the number of fans (Grossberg 1992: 156). Furthermore, the contexts in which music is heard and used varies greatly, even for one individual, and this complicates and multiplies the meanings the listener creates and the music "projects".

Besides questions of meaning, there also exists the question of who constitutes the audience of a particular artist. After looking at various studies on the activities of music audiences, Keith Negus concludes that they do not "fit neatly into many existing theoretical model or commercial music marketing categories" (Negus 1996: 32). As a reaction to scholarship in subcultural theory (see Hebdige 1977), he proposes that "musical activity cannot be contained within the discrete boundaries proposed by theories of subculture, nor by the music industry's segmentation of social life into marketing categories or taste publics" (Negus 1996: 32).

The audience of each of the women in this study is large and greatly varied, if proven only by the sheer volume of record sales. Given the variance between individuals and the possibility of change within any one person's use of a given music, it is clearly impossible to do a comprehensive study of the way individuals use a given artist's music, the energies they invest in it, and the meanings they appropriate from it. A discussion of audience perception is also problematic in a number of other ways: the audience of a given artist changes its perceptions and its members; the public influences

the media just as the media may alter depiction of an artist based on what the audience likes, yet at the same time, the media influences the public; and the audience is not homogeneous.

In spite of the problems posed in determining audience identity, it is important that this study attempt to come to terms with how rock conveys meaning and is used in people's everyday lives (if only a segment of the wide fan base) in order to approach an understanding of the relationship between text and audience. One can search for clues about the ideologies and meanings that are articulated about an artist, which are found circulating among the media, concert attendees, and web-sites (which now facilitate a selective fan base). The reasons for which people buy and listen to albums are as varied as the people themselves and one can only come to partial ideas of which meanings are appropriated. A partial picture is still more helpful then none, however, in ascertaining an artist's place and influence in society. To discover what may be representative of various responses to a given artist, I will look at a collection of reviews of performances and albums. Interviews in popular music magazines are also useful in what they reveal both about what the interviewer wishes to present about an artist, as well as what the artist wishes to present about herself.

Delimiting this study's approach

There are broader issues, particularly with regards to image, audience, gender, and feminism, that would be interesting to investigate but will not be dealt with in this paper due to constrictions of time and focus. One of these issues is how the effects of feminism evident in the work of these three female rock musicians can be extended beyond the realm of rock music and drawn into a larger picture of feminism at work in society in general. Other questions which arise include: Are the approaches these women take in constructing image in some manner reflective of current ways of thinking about gender roles? Is this also true of audience reception? Does the fact that

there are more women in rock indicate a larger and more influential female audience and market?

Answering these questions would require sociological and demographic studies of the artists and their audience that lie beyond the intentions of this paper. I will be limiting my focus to a more musicologically-based discussion of the artists' music. I will attempt, for example, to show how gender plays a role in the creation of style, but the focus will remain on the musical style itself and not on the gender issues which surround it.

II. Sarah McLachlan – Developing a style through an earth mother/goddess persona

The elements of Sarah McLachlan's style are derived from her adoption of an earth mother persona by which I am referring to projecting comforting, nurturing qualities and a connection with nature. Because this persona intersects with the mythology of "mother earth", I will use the terms "earth mother" and "earth goddess" interchangeably. The earth mother persona is worked out through specific aspects of McLachlan's music including her lyrics, vocal style, harmonic progressions, instrumentation, production and image. McLachlan has created a musical style which is both personal and mythic. It is not surprising that she acknowledges her musical influences to be Kate Bush, who explores fantasy and fairy tales, and musicians that could be described as "New Age" such as Enya and fellow Canadian Loreena McKinnet (Powers 1997: 337). Like these artists, she has managed to build up a substantial following of fans who are drawn to her poetic, carefully-crafted musical style.

The persona of earth mother is further worked out by the tension created by the sense of emotional empathy and isolation (or a certain unattainable quality). Her lyrics deal with emotion and relationships, and she does so poetically with images of nature and color. Though she has made a career out of emotional revelation, she manages to distance herself from her musical presentation, perpetuating the myth of earth mother/goddess.

Lyrics

Sarah McLachlan emerged on the Canadian music scene in 1987, reaching a primarily non-mainstream, college audience with her album *Touch*. This album as well as the 1991 follow-up, *Solace*, has been described as "oversugared, with lyrics lifted

straight from the pages of a flower-print diary" (Powers 1997: 337). Her most recent albums, *Fumbling Toward Ecstasy* (1993) and *Surfacing* (1997) have seen a new maturity and greater commercial success.

McLachlan's lyrics are poetic and ambiguous -- relaying an aural soundscape appears to be more important than communicating explicit meaning directly through the lyrics. The lyrics work in conjunction with McLachlan's smooth, liquid voice and an equally fluid musical track to create a general sensory impression through poetic images of color and nature. There is no hard-hitting message. Her songs are primarily about typical personal struggles or relationships which are discussed ambiguously and without gender, so as to be as inclusive as possible.

The lyrics to most of McLachlan's songs read like poetry, deriving many images from nature. The symbolic use of nature for expressive purposes is just one aspect of McLachlan's music that contributes to a description of her overall style, which I will call "earth goddess". An example of her "earthy" poetics is found in "Strange World" from the album *Touch*:

> "We walk without a sound across a barren landscape
> Your eyes are twisted down to a dew entrailed ground
> We watch the stars as they slowly fade away and is
> the clearing sky I see
> The cold stone face of morning setting in on me
>
> Chorus: It's a strange world
> It's a very strange world that leaves me
> Holding on to nothing when there's nothing left to lose
>
> Your touch is cold and damp, the devil's in your eyes
> I wonder why I always let you lead me on this way
> 'Cause you see only what you want to see
> You feel only what you want to
> And I am on the outside of your strange world
>
> Chorus
>
> We're walking hand in hand, we'll walk this way forever

Our eyes have risen to the water's edge watching with the tides
The stars have fallen to another day and the sun warms our path to
Find the reasons leave us far behind in our strange world..."

This song seems to be about two people who are unable to know each other intimately. Only the second verse tells us what the song is about; it is framed with verses which leave only poetic images with ambiguous meaning.

"Sad Clown" from the same album again uses water among other visual images to portray the ache and loneliness of a love relationship which has come to an end.

"A time so haunting, moonlight in the mist
Lay me down beside you oh as long as it lasts
From the river comes a Figure drifting slowly by
Trailing long the water, leaving softer than a sigh softer than a sigh

All the feelings they remain like a still life
A dying swan song forever lost you cries of glory
The rain is falling down like silence in a shroud when
All that really matters is I'm all alone, I'm all alone..."

In "Drawn to the Rhythm" (*Solace*), the sea is a compelling force:

"When we wore a heart of stone we wandered to the sea
Hoping to find some comfort there yearning to feel free
And we were mesmerized by the lull of the night and the smells that filled the air
And we laid us down on sandy ground; it was cold but we didn't care

Chorus: And we were drawn to the rhythm, drawn to the rhythm
Drawn to the rhythm of the sea (2x)"

In this song, our senses are confronted with nature – we can smell the ocean breeze, feel the texture of the sand and the splash of the waves, while the darkness of the night enfolds us.

Even when the lyrics do not use images from nature, McLachlan conveys feelings, relationships, and other stories visually. In a song of ambiguous meaning,

"Black" uses color and blindness to illustrate what is probably meant to be a confession of failing to search out the reasons why we do the things we do.

> "As the walls are closing in
> And the colors fade to black
> And my eyes are falling fast and deep into me
> And I follow the tracks that lead me down
>
> And they wonder sometimes where they see all
> The sadness and pain the truth brings to light
>
> Chorus: Cause I can't see no reason
> What is blind cannot see..."

In the more recent "Black and White", the words show a discrepancy between what the subject feels and how he/she actually acts in order to get along:

> "And all I feel is black and white
> And I'm wound up small and tight
> And I don't know who I am..."

The majority of McLachlan's songs deal directly with the emotions and feelings of one person about a particular relationship, a theme that is common for rock music in general. After listening to most of these songs, the listener is not left with a particular tale or specific situation, but a sense of the persona's emotions. McLachlan is able to draw her listeners into the feelings of the song, using sensory images found in nature and those of color, causing the audience to empathize with the character of the song.

At times the songs portray darker emotions. McLachlan draws the listener into a drug addict's character with the feelings of tension and ugliness in the songs "Angel" (*Surfacing*) and "Ice" (*Fumbling Towards Ecstasy*). It is even more disturbing to be drawn into the feelings of a rapist in her most popular song to date, "Possession" (*Fumbling Towards Ecstasy*). McLachlan wrote this song as a result of her own experience of being stalked and her consequent desire to uncover the point of view of someone of a depraved nature. There is nothing sinister about the tone of the music

until one knows that it is written from McLachlan's speculation of a rapist's point of view.

The more usual subjects of McLachlan's songs are personas who either experience a failed romantic relationship ("Do What You Have To" -- *Surfacing*, "Plenty" -- *Fumbling Towards Ecstasy*, "Vox" and "Sad Clown" -- *Touch*), enjoy a good one ("Ice Cream" and "I Love You" -- *Fumbling Towards Ecstasy*) or work through problems in their romantic relationships ("Circle" -- *Fumbling Towards Ecstasy*, "Sweet Surrender" and "Full of Grace" -- *Surfacing*). Equally common are songs about self-doubt ("Out of the Shadows" -- *Touch*, "Black" -- *Solace*, "Black and White" -- *Surfacing*), self-discovery ("Witness"-- *Surfacing*, "Fear" -- *Fumbling Towards Ecstasy*), and self-understanding ("Elsewhere" and "Fumbling Toward Ecstasy" -- *Fumbling Towards Ecstasy*). These are emotions and experiences which are familiar to most people at some point in their life.

There are two other aspects of the music – ones that are effective in portraying emotion and image – that will be discussed in conjunction with the lyrics: vocal style and musical production. In discussing McLachlan's vocal style, it is necessary to remember that because she writes the melodic lines, vocal style and melodic invention are co-dependent. In other words, McLachlan's vocal style directly affects how she writes her melodic line and likewise, the contour of the melodic line reveals how she uses her voice. Her vocal style, and melodic line by association, are characterized by fluid, smooth lines which still have much motion and a fair bit of range ("Into the Fire" -- *Solace*, "Do what you Have to Do" -- *Surfacing*, "Plenty" -- *Fumbling Towards Ecstasy*).

Vocal style

A study of McLachlan's melodic lines is essential in this study, as it is the particular character of these lines and, consequently, her vocal style which most

prominently figure into an understanding of what makes her overall style unique. Discussing the music of kd lang, John Potter argues that lang's voice acts as the primary vehicle for communicating the essence of the songs (which he believes to be a certain eroticism), quite apart from the lyrics ("the effect would be the same if kd sang the train time table in the same way") (Potter 1996: 194). The "effect" of McLachlan's music could similarly be felt solely through the way she sings her melodic lines, regardless of lyrical content. As in the case with kd lang, "the poetry... is in the mode of delivery, as much as in the text itself" (Potter 1996: 194). In fact, there are no written lyrics included in the last album jacket.[6] Her voice, like lang's, contains a certain quality which effectively heightens speech and creates a sense that the singer is able to speak, as though in intimate conversation (Potter 1996: 194). This sensuous quality is capable of emotionally connecting with the listener, and drawing her/him into a particular way of being. I would like to present an analysis which demonstrates how McLachlan is effective in creating a space of calm and comfort, maternal qualities which demonstrate her projection of the image of earth goddess.

Though my intention is to elucidate the musical processes through which particular modes of articulation take place, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of listening to the recorded sound. In fact Gracyk goes so far as to state, "Insofar as there can be a rock aesthetic, a general theory about rock music as an object of critical attention, I propose that it must focus on recorded music" (Gracyk 1996: ix). He argues this must be the case because not only is "the recording the most characteristic medium of rock" (Gracyk 1996: 75), but also as a primarily autographic phenomena, rock music has a "sound" that is important. More specifically, it is "the precise details of timbre and articulation" which can be "essential properties of a musical work", properties which cannot be notated (Gracyk 1996: 32). Style is a composite of general music processes and more subtle nuances, which are more difficult to articulate in writing. While listening to the music presented in the discography is irreplaceable, a discussion of musical style is complemented and understood in more concrete terms by engaging in

an examination of the musical processes, partly through traditional musical analysis, in order to understand how articulation of the various elements of style takes place.

Continuing with the analysis of McLachlan's vocal style, one finds that the most characteristic lines are those which rise in any combination of intervals and then fall, or are pitched at a high point and then fall. This gives the impression of "waves" of sound, the effect of which is underscored even further by the smooth, undulating way in which the lines are sung. Some of these "waves" are larger, or utilize a greater range in the voice. Others are wider or have a broader arch, covering more metric space within the song ("Angel" – *Surfacing,* "Plenty" and "Good Enough" -- *Fumbling Towards Ecstasy* ").

Almost all of McLachlan's songs demonstrate these wave patterns. The example of "Plenty" shows the three different falling wave shapes which comprise the three parts of the song -- verse, bridge, chorus. Example 1a and 1b show two waves of standard width, with 1b employing a greater height. Example 1c shows a much larger width repeating its undulation and postponing any cadence until the third line, which ends the chorus.

The one song that noticeably breaks this pattern is "Fear" (*Fumbling Towards Ecstasy*) in which the melodic line ends higher than where it began. The song is an exception to McLachlan's repertoire of falling melodic lines and illustrates an uncharacteristic heightening of intense emotion. This tension is portrayed through the high vocal register as well as the interruption of the predictable fall at the end of the vocal line, which is underpinned harmonically by a movement from the V (of a major key) to the vi. (This harmonic movement is also found at the end of the bridge of "Black and White" but since the melody retains its characteristic downward swoop in this song, the effect is far less unsettling.)

While the majority of McLachlan's songs feature various falling wave patterns, in others she undulates around the tonic, mediant, or dominant as illustrated in "Witness". (Listen also to the verses of "Full of Grace", "Witness", and "Building a

Mystery" -- *Surfacing*, as well as to the chorus of "Drawn to the Rhythm" -- *Solace*) (Ex.2). It is important to note that while building a melody around these three scale steps is probably the most common melodic construction in rock music and Western music in general, McLachlan's particular way of creating melody always insinuates movement. Where many rock singers imitate speech, with repetition on a single note, McLachlan moves smoothly from one note to another in a gentle, rolling fashion. Even when there is some repetition on one note (verse of "Mary" -- *Fumbling Towards Ecstasy*), McLachlan "sings through" every note, following through the melodic line, singing on the vowels, and, thereby, creating forward motion, as would be expected in classical voice training. This contrasts to much rock singing which allows pitches to slide downwards on a single note, attacks notes with a sharp articulation, and vocalizes the consonants, all of which create the speech-like singing we will see in Sheryl Crow's vocal style.

Another aspect of McLachlan's vocal style is that her voice can be described as "unified", that is, her voice is predictable and stays within the same general timbre. Even when portraying different characters, her voice quality remains smooth and controlled in terms of volume and timbre and through an avoidance of sudden register changes and vocal "excesses" such as yelps and screams. "Possession" (one of the songs referred to above) illustrates most strongly the fact that McLachlan keeps herself distanced from the emotion and experience she is singing about. At one level she draws the listener into a sensory world of visual images, tactile sensations, and emotions, but on another level, she manages to stay above it by presenting this world reservedly, without much dramatic intonation or effect. She is only the facilitator for the listener entering the song, whether the listener does so by personal association with the characters and situation of the song, or whether the song evokes a particular mood in the listener.

The smooth, controlled, and resonant quality of McLachlan's voice leaves me, as a listener, with an impression of comfort, confirming the "mother earth"

associations which correlate with her appropriation of the "earth goddess" image. The only time the voice is not used in a fluid, comfortable way is in "Fear" (also mentioned above) when, in order to get the listener to enter into that emotion, she pitches her voice at an extremely uncomfortable high range; but otherwise, she does not utilize any other dramatic effects. When McLachlan does make use of different vocal timbres, she does not alter her voice physically, but artificially, through a variety of production techniques, including reverb and voice doubling, as she does in "Fear", and "Black and White" (*Fumbling Towards Ecstasy)*. So beside keeping her voice reserved and at a consistent timbre, McLachlan creates distance by masking her own voice through mechanical devices, all of which demonstrate her desire to keep herself personally and emotionally detached, while still drawing the listener into the song.

Harmonic progressions

The other factor to consider in examining how McLachlan's vocal lines are constructed is the harmonic progressions which are used. A short melodic statement is elongated over the progression, resulting in a broader shape and greater directional length than is typical in rock music. (What is meant by typical will be demonstrated later in the music of Sheryl Crow). For example, the words of the chorus to "Sweet Surrender" (*Surfacing*) take up one short line: "Sweet Surrender is all I've ever had to give." However, this line is sung over an eight-bar chord progression, V-IV-I-vi-IV-V-I-I, resulting in a long phrase (Ex.3).

The harmonic progressions that McLachlan uses tend to be related to the passive undertone in her music. As is common in rock music, her cadences are usually IV-I rather than V-I; the plagal cadence creates a more passive and gentle effect than the stronger perfect cadence. The chord progressions in "Good Enough" (*Fumbling Towards Ecstasy)* display an avoidance of the V-I cadence typical of McLachlan, although she does utilize chord V in semi-cadences:

Verse: I-V-IV
I-iii-IV
ii-I6-IV9-V6/V-V
ii-I6-IV9-V6/V-V
IVminor7-I

Chorus: IV-vi
IV-vi
IV-I-V

Even when the V chord is used in a semi-cadence, the final cadence is most usually IV-I , as is exemplified in the chorus for "Hold On" (*Fumbling Towards Ecstasy*):

ii-V-ii-V
vi-I-IV-V
vi-I-IV-V
ii-V-ii-IV-I

The chord progressions in "Aida" (*Surfacing*) -- vi–IV-I, vi-IV-iii, I-IV-I6-ii-I -- also demonstrate an avoidance of the dominant cadence in favor of the plagal cadence. Likewise, the exclusion of the V-I cadence in "Witness" (*Surfacing*) by the insertion of chord IV or ii creates a less conclusive effect:

Verse: vi-V-IV-bVII-IV-I-ii; Chorus: I-V-ii (3x) IV.

In "Building a Mystery" (*Surfacing*), the revolving vi-iv-I-V progression highlights the V as a function of a semi-cadence or deceptive cadence, not as part of a perfect cadence. Although McLachlan does use the perfect cadence, it is far more common to see it interrupted or usurped by the plagal cadence.

Instrumentation and production

McLachlan uses basic rock instrumentation: drums, bass guitar, electric and acoustic guitar, some keyboards, and piano. The piano and guitar are given approximately equal status, unlike the case of a lot of rock music in which the electric guitar is allowed to dominate the sound.

The instrumental and technical production is another effective means of creating the space for a specific emotion, or to provide the setting for a particular situation. A good example of the latter is the sound production for "I Love You" (*Surfacing*). This song is begun by a deep bass (provided by keyboards), providing the recurring rhythm of a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth, accompanied by static, ethereal-sounding chord tracks which are laid down by a synthesizer in a high register. McLachlan's voice enters at the center of the mix, heavy with reverb, no vibrato, and keeps within a soft dynamic range even on the high notes, giving the strange effect of being very close, yet seeming almost like a ghostly apparition. As in most of her work, McLachlan's voice is in the center of the mix, but here it is distorted to sound misty. The solo acoustic guitar solo furthers this surreal effect by allowing the listener a physical connection in letting him/her hear the moving of the fingers across the frets, yet keeping the atmosphere dreamlike with the meandering quality of the guitar's solo. The production combines with the lyrics and the instrumentation to give the impression of a present yet hazy still-life portrait of someone in love.

McLachlan's "earth mother" image

Sarah McLachlan has been able to create a distinctive identity through her personal appearance, performance gestures, use of color, and unique artwork. In contrast to chameleon-like artists, she has maintained a consistent persona throughout her career in her album cover and design, music video, media appearances, and stage personality. This persona confirms the myth of "earth mother", a title I have already used in reference to her.

McLachlan wears "earthy" rich colors of deep reds, browns, wines, and blues. Her outfits often include a loose-fitting pant with a blouse with floppy cuffs, or a dark blazer with a richly colored blouse. There is nothing androgynous about her look -- she

is definitely feminine -- but she avoids low-cut blouses or high-cut skirts.

Nettwerk, McLachlan's record company, distributes and sells everything from the typical T-shirts and posters to pendants, rings, and sunglasses. What is significant are the types of designs that are chosen. Besides the album cover T-shirts, there are a host of other designs, many of which McLachlan herself has designed, which follow an "earth mother" theme. There are two T-shirts with a star design, a black and white "Cosmo" T-shirt, and a "Smiling Sun" T-shirt in a gold and bronze design. The Medusa T-shirt sports a "winged goddess with a textured sunlit background" (McLachlan 1997), while the "Tree of Life" T-shirt, which carries McLachlan's own design, has also been made into a dress and corresponding poster. She also designed art posters including the Medusa silkscreen, a naked "Pregnant Goddess" art print, and a three-panel drawing of artwork which appeared on the *Fumbling Towards Ecstasy* album, featuring a man and woman embracing against the backdrop of yet another winged medusa. The jewelry McLachlan has designed includes silver pendants and rings shaped into blocks, hearts, and suns. Other merchandise include hats made of recycled cotton, mugs, and a cotton/hemp bag sporting one of her designs.

This type of merchandise was only some of what was displayed at the Lilith Fair Tour, an event which has become virtually synonymous with Sarah McLachlan, giving her considerable exposure. Lilith Fair is a touring music festival of rock, pop, and folk music featuring a revolving line-up of exclusively female artists. The tour was the brainchild of McLachlan as an active response to "Lollapalooza", a touring rock music festival which featured almost exclusively male acts. This kind of sexism in the pop music scene inspired McLachlan to plan the two Lilith Fair tours that have taken place in the last two years, and is scheduled again for 1998. Subtitled "A Celebration of Women in Music", Lilith Fair is the only women's rock music festival to reach a mainstream audience. The artists who performed with the festival so far have been mostly folk-rock oriented and played a number of acoustic sets. The tour did present some diversity in music styles, however, ranging from Mary Jane Lamond and Tara

McLean (folk), to Emmy-Lou Harris (country) to Tracy Bonham (hard rock).

The booths that were set up at the various concert sites dealt with specifically women's issues, such as rape, abuse, and breast cancer, as well as environmental issues. The Lilith Fair event that I attended on August 22, 1997 in Calgary, Alberta confirmed this. The Community Sexual Health and Choice held a booth which distributed free condoms and information on abortion and birth control. The Calgary Animal Rights Coalition handed out pamphlets titled "Feminists for Animal Rights", and The Artists Against Racism sold out of their stock of T-shirts and buttons less than half-way through the show (Eckler 1997:20). McLachlan presented a cheque to the Calgary's Women's Emergency Association as a result of a donation of a portion of each ticket sold for the show.

There were other factors, of course, which contributed to the atmosphere of the festival. Besides the regular promotional paraphenalia that accompanied various artists, such as T-shirts, hats, and posters, there were numerous other commercial venues. Clothing venues such as the "Love Tent" sold tie-dyed, loose-fitting dresses. Other venues sold handcrafted silver jewelry. McLachlan had such an unusually large number and variety of items (some of which are mentioned above) that a catalogue was available.

Attendees of Lilith Fair were mostly women. Some estimated a 60-40 split between females and males respectively (Muretich 1997: 20), while others estimated that two-thirds of the concert-goers were women. The tolerant, relaxed atmosphere allowed lesbians to feel free to be openly so.

The stage featured two huge side screens with drawings of "Lilith", a naked woman set in a madonna-like pose with rays of light emanating around her. Lilith is, purportedly, the first wife of Adam, whose story is found in Jewish mythology but omitted from the Bible. She is the "other" wife who demanded equality with her husband and left him when he would not concur.

The choice of Lilith as a representational symbol of the event was clear in its

intention to disrupt traditional patriarchal representations of women as a source of weakness. The image of Lilith was also effective as an encouragement to celebrate the value and independence of women.

This tour differed from its male-dominated counterparts in more ways than just the gender of the performers. An atmosphere of relaxation and calmness was fostered at the concert. The crowd was praised for its politeness by one of the mainstage acts, Lisa Loeb, when it sat down to listen so that others could see. Such acts of consideration would be unheard of, let alone encouraged, at a traditional rock festival such as Edgefest or Lollapalooza, where acts are fed by crowd frenzy, and mosh pits appear as an archetype of male aggression.

Besides the more relaxed atmosphere, the stereotypical activity of females -- shopping -- was highlighted and encouraged through commercial venues (selling dresses and jewelry) which catered to a specifically female audience. Women's issues and concerns were heightened through the information distributed by cause-related booths. Both women and men were encouraged to participate in a music festival from a female's perspective. This was most obviously presented by the all-female line-up but was apparent in extra-musical signs as well.

The festival perpetuates the "earth goddess" image McLachlan appropriates. She was, and continues to be, the spokesperson for the festival, and her conception of what it is all about is what gets conveyed to the public. As her personal vision, the festival propagates an ideology of solidarity among women and a recognition of their "innate" connection with nature (following the association with mother earth) through visual constructs of her own device. The design of the stage screens and the program card could have come off her own album designs. The commercial items on display align with her own relaxed, earthy sense of style. McLachlan could be Lilith herself, articulating a strong yet unapologetically female persona.

A further look at McLachlan's use of music video echoes the associations with nature that are apparent in her music. Both of the examples I have chosen, one from

the late 1980s and one of her most recent (1997), contain the deep, rich colors I have already mentioned. In the earlier video, "Vox", McLachlan is seen standing alone at various locations on the shore of a tranquil pool of water. Attention is given to stones falling into the water, creating a ripple effect. At the end of the video, she throws rose petals into the water.

In the video for "Sweet Surrender", associations with nature are not as direct. It is rather the unfocused, dreamy images of McLachlan and her gentle, slow-moving physical gestures which are significant in creating a sensory impression. These images and gestures are consistent with the characteristic smoothness that is found in almost all her songs. There is a narrative, involving McLachlan and another woman, but it does not contain any logical sequence of events, and could be interpreted any number of ways. The narrative is not the point of the video or of the song. Depicting a story or presenting a sequence of events is irrelevant. The video creates an impression, and evokes an emotion and a sensual response, as in the video for "Vox". Images of McLachlan shimmer in and out of focus and from one scene to another, as if we are seeing her face as a reflection in water. Her movements include swaying her head gently back and forth, running in slow motion, and sliding her body (fully clothed, incidentally) smoothly over a sheepskin rug.

These two videos demonstrate how McLachlan visually affirms the images and gestures that are present aurally in the music. This is accomplished through the visual cues of water, the particular choice of deep, rich color, and the use of slow, gentle motion. It should be mentioned here that the physical gestures evidenced in these videos are congruent with McLachlan's general performance style which I observed at her live performance at the Lilith Fair concert. Her movements are consistently fluid and smooth. Nothing is done hastily or with quick or sharp motion. She moves her arms in a gentle, undulating manner, creating a sense of comfort in the observer.

McLachlan's music creates a space which invites the listener to experience emotion, albeit reserved emotion. The shape of her melodic lines, which gently unfold

in downward waves, paralleled by smooth, undulating physical movements, invites the listener to partake in a particular ideology which is nurturing and comforting. The iconography seen at Lilith Fair and in her albums and merchandise catalogues points to a deliberate attempt to associate herself with mythology, and in particular, Lilith, one of the first women of the world.

Audience reception

The process of articulation is not complete without the receiver of that process – the audience. I will discuss audience in this case primarily from the perspectives of the press. These observations highlight McLachlan's ability to connect with many people in a personal, emotional level.

In reviews of McLachlan's newest release, *Surfacing*, one observes conflicting reactions. A number of reviewers recognize her ability to connect with people in a universal way by "transform[ing] life experience into an essential of her music" (Violanti 1997). Several connected this observation to the work of Joni Mitchell, linking McLachlan to a familiar tradition of sensitive songwriters, and by association, the longevity of such a tradition (Collins 1997). When McLachlan speaks about exposing herself in writing (following the "confessional" tradition of singer-songwriter), she explains that on the first albums, she was uncomfortable with it, and put herself into other characters. By the last album she felt "more willing to expose [her] weak spots" (Reighley 1997); however, personal exposure does not occur in any deducible way. When asked about her philosophy on song-writing in an interview with Time, McLachlan responded: "Creating a great sense of empathy... Finding something in somebody else's art that resonates in your own life makes you feel better" (Farley 1997: 45). Another critic agreed with this assessment, stating, "she posits an empathy accessible to us all" (White 1996: 192).

As has been discussed earlier, it is the particular way in which McLachlan

creates empathy which makes her distinctive within the larger tradition of the singer-songwriter who shares life experience. McLachlan may share life experience but does not grant personal revelation, that is to say, her success derives from an ability to create "emotional landscapes" (Braunschweiger 1997) which include a broad range of human emotion into which the listener can enter. On a parallel note, another reviewer stated that McLachlan "gained an audience with stately, inward-turning songs full of veiled emotion" (Cincinnati Enquirer 1997). This implies that there are a large number of people who wish to embrace a quieter, more "meditative aura", and are willing to take an introspective look at themselves and their relationships.

There is a more skeptical reaction to McLachlan's music, however. The latest McLachlan album has been mocked as "ethereal pop with an unsettling lack of substance" (Remstein 1997). A reviewer at Lilith Fair described McLachlan's music as "watery post-folk art-rock....[the music is] about meandering melody and liquid textures...Not unpleasant, but far from commanding" (Sullivan 1997). Herein lies the success and the criticism of McLachlan's art. The abstractness of "meandering melodies" and "liquid textures" which repulse some for their lack of concreteness and goal-directness are exactly those characteristics which attract the audience with which she is successful. These qualities allow for introspection, meditation, and solace (following the title of her second album).

Conclusion

All of the elements of McLachlan's style provide evidence of her use of the earth mother persona as a means to create points of mediation with her audience, using her gender to her advantage. McLachlan makes us believe she understands human nature and emotion; her songs invite the listener to empathize with the experiences of another. This feeling of community, even solidarity, particularly among women, was enacted at the Lilith Fair concert, where the audience was encouraged to listen and

share in the experiences of the artists. The feeling of community was also fostered by the apparent comradery between the various artists who performed: many acts invited other artists to share their talents on their songs and the evening culminated in a "grand finale" of all the mainstage acts.

The earth mother persona also intersects with mythology, which was a dominant theme in McLachlan's iconography at the concert and is present in her artwork, album designs, and merchandise. This creates an aura of exoticism, which supports the earth goddess connection, especially via the identification with the figure of Lilith.

The lyrics and production in McLachlan's music bring to light the tension that is inherent in the earth mother/goddess persona. The general production of McLachlan's albums brings McLachlan's vocals to the forefront, with the instruments providing the sonic landscape conducive to creating an emotional invitation to the listener (as was discussed in "I Love You"). The lyrics, while empathetic with the emotional experiences of humankind, are cloaked in ambiguous visual images which lend a distant, unattainable quality to her music. As shown in "I Love You", the production techniques can also be used to that end.

The poetic images of color and nature found in McLachlan's lyrics extend to her videos, as well as to her clothing and albums, which feature the rich colors one would associate with an earth mother persona. Another visual cue that triggers this association is her smooth, undulating performance gestures which invite impressions of comfort.

McLachlan's resonant, full-throated vocal style brings the persona of earth mother into an aural space. Her vocal style opens up new categories of what constitutes a rock voice, a voice defined by its calm, controlled quality. By this statement, I am not encouraging essentialism in relation to gender categories. What I am suggesting is that rock music is encountering new voices in rock that differ from the syllabic, "untrained" vocalizing tradition that Sheryl Crow continues (which will be

discussed). Accompanying this vocal style are melodies which have contour, particularly a downward wave-shaped contour and harmonic progressions featuring plagal cadences which have a settling, sometimes comforting, effect. Likewise, McLachlan's frequent use of piano and acoustic guitar provide a gentler alternative to an electric guitar-based sound. McLachlan's smooth, mellismatic vocal and melodic style instates a new voice into the rock's repertoire, one that is becoming more common with new artists such as Paula Cole and Shawn Colvin.

III. Sheryl Crow - Creating Style through Dialogue

Sheryl Crow presents another strong yet quite different voice of a woman in rock. Unlike McLachlan, who looks to the ethereal Kate Bush as a heroine, Crow cites her influences to be classic rock bands such as Journey, The Band, the Rolling Stones, Boston, Foreigner, Kansas, and Led Zeppelin (Schruers 1996: 64), demonstrating her deliberate attempt to place herself on a continuum with a long line of male predecessors.

She was recognized as a songwriter before she became a performer, writing and co-writing songs for Eric Clapton, Celine Dion, and Wynonna Judd (White 1996b). When her first album, *Tuesday Night Music Club* (1993), was released, the media was quick to point out that Crow was a former back-up singer for Michael Jackson, but when the album won multiple Grammys, it was obvious she would not have to be worried about establishing herself as a solo singer. The first album was the result of collaboration between Crow and seven male musicians, though Crow was the primary writer and is credited for all the songs on the album.

The success of the first album allowed or encouraged Crow to assert more control over her own career, as her second eponymous album demonstrated. She surrounded herself with an entirely new set of musicians and replaced Bill Bottrell with herself as the sole producer. Though she still had a writing partner on most of her songs, there are some on this album that she has written entirely on her own. The media picked up on this newly emergent independence in articles such as "Sheryl Crow Stands Alone" (Gee 1996) and "Sheryl Crow Gets Tough" (Morse 1997). The point is that Crow entered the rock business in the stereotypical female roles of back-up singer, writer, and as a front singer for a band in which the producer and performers were male before breaking away and gaining independence, taking over important facets of her identity as a musician. This included playing many of the instruments on the album, writing, producing, and hiring her own musicians and others involved in recording.

Crow has created a musical style which is unique in its mixture of musical genres, combining what has been called "R 'n' B strut and classic pop sensibility" (Gee 1997). Her sound is rooted in the mainstream rock of the late 1960s and 1970s (particularly rhythm and blues rock), yet incorporates country ("No One Said it would be Easy" and "All I Wanna Do" -- *Tuesday Night Music Club*, "If it Makes You Happy" -- *Sheryl Crow*), jazz ("We Do What We Can" -- *Tuesday Night Music Club*), funk ("Love is a Good Thing" and "Superstar" -- *Sheryl Crow*, "Solidify" -- *Tuesday Night Music Club*), and folk ballad ("The Book" and "Redemption Day" -- *Sheryl Crow*), to create an eclectic, heterogenous style.

Crow's means of building her particular musical style is through a creative dialogue with her musical roots – rhythm and blues rock -- through her narrative lyrical style, vocal style, instrumentation, and image. Although this is a male tradition, Crow finds a place in rock's discourse for a feminine perspective which manifests itself particularly in her image and lyrics.

Crow as narrator

Sheryl Crow's songs tell stories. Her songs are frequently about people experiencing the hard life. "Run, Baby, Run" (*Tuesday Night Music Club*) is about a girl, born in the sixties to hippy parents. Her mother is high on drugs, and her father gives her a reason to "run" from the familiar to the comfort of strangers to survive:

> Chorus: "Run baby, Run baby, Run baby, run (2x)
> Past the arms of the familiar
> And their talk of better days
> To the comfort of the strangers
> Slipping out before they say "So long"
> Baby loves to run."

"Leaving Las Vegas" (*Tuesday Night Music Club*) tells the story of a club dancer who claims she will leave Las Vegas, realizing she has had a long losing streak at blackjack.

A young couple's financial and practical problems are ruminated in "No One Said it would be Easy" (*Tuesday Night Music Club*). Again, the text clearly spells out a narrative:

"It's obvious the trouble we're in
When your father pulls up in a Mercedes Benz.
He says he just happened to be in the neighborhood
But before he leaves he slips the landlord the rent.
You say, 'I know how you try
But honey, let's eat out tonight'.

Chorus: No one said it would be easy;
But no one said it'd be this hard.
No one said it would be easy;
No one thought we'd come this far.

You can't seem to ever fold up a shirt.
I bring it up and you think I'm a jerk.
But I think we're here to stay;
I can't imagine it any other way."

The hit "All I Wanna Do" (*Tuesday Night Music Club*) is a setting of a poem by Wyn Cooper. This poem does not attempt to rhyme, rather acting as a rambling commentary on a person's train of thought as he or she thinks of the futility of the working world.

""All I wanna do is have a little fun before I die,' Says the man next to me out of nowhere, apropos Of nothing.
He says his name's William but I'm sure he's Bill or Billy, Mac or Buddy, he's plain ugly to me, And I wonder if he's ever had fun in his life.
We are drinking beer at noon on Tuesday In a bar that faces a giant car wash
The good people of the world are washing their cars on their lunch break, hosing and scrubbing as best they can in skirts and suits
They drive their shiny Datsuns and Buicks Back to the phone company, the record store,
Well they're nothing like Billy and me.
Chorus: All I wanna do is have some fun I got a feeling I'm not the only one

(2x)
Until the sun comes up over Santa Monica Boulevard

I like a good beer buzz early in the morning and Billy likes to peel the labels from his bottles of Bud and shred them on the bar
Then he lights every match in an oversized pack Letting each one burn down to his thick fingers
Before blowing and cursing them out - and he's watching the Buds as they spin on the floor
A happy couple enters the bar dangerously close
The bartender looks up from his want ads..."

Crow also deals with more disturbing issues, confronting sexual harassment in the music business in "I Can Do For You" (*Tuesday Night Music Club*). In this song, Crow sings from the perspective of a man in the entertainment business who uses his position of power over a girl, claiming "What I can do for you there's no one else on God's green earth can do" and that she's "gonna need [my] help", offering it if she'll sleep with him. Unlike McLachlan, with her empathetic look into the perspective of her stalker, Crow unsympathetically exposes a man's deliberate misuse of power:

> "You're never gonna make it all by yourself... I have so much to offer if you just be nice, if you do what I say. Don't make me say it twice. Do you mind if I just run my hand up thus... I'm gonna be your man."

Crow's second album takes political positions with several songs. "Hard to make a stand" critiques American society which ostracizes the marginalized, such as gays and cross-dressers, with their "great big guns and small ambitions". Her anti-gun stance was reacted to strongly by the huge department store chain Wal-mart, who refused to stock her album because of the contents of her song, "Love is a Good Thing":

> "Watch out sister, watch our brother, Watch our children while they kill each other with a gun they bought at Walmart discount stores".

A seventies funk beat combined with the sixties sentiment of universal love and peace are the backdrop to the various current concerns which are found in this song, including a list of social ills, such as handgun violence among children, crooked politicians, and corruption in the justice system.

Carrying on with this political theme, "Redemption Day" was written after a USO tour taken with the Clintons in Bosnia. The song challenges those in power who allow the horrors of war to continue:

> "Fire rages in the streets and swallows everything it meets
> It's just an image often seen on television
> Come leaders, come you men of great
> Let us hear you pontificate
> Your many virtues laid to waste and we aren't listening
> What do you have for us today
> Throw us a bone but save the plate
> On why we waited til so late, Was there no oil to excavate
> No riches in trade for the fate of every person who died in hate
> Throw us a bone, you men of great..."

Some have observed that this folk ballad echoes the anti-Vietnam war songs of the seventies (Gee 1997). There are, in fact, not only similarities in content, but also in style to Bob Dylan's political protest songs. The verses are accompanied with only acoustic guitars; the chorus has expanded instrumentation, but it is done rather sparingly. Crow's voice also takes on the slurred twang Dylan is known for.

Other songs describe people, not in an emotional or personal way but with rhymes derived from popular culture, as well as commodities of North American society. "A Change" (*Sheryl Crow*) is one such song, describing people whose lives need change.

> "Ten years living in a paper bag. Feedback baby, he's a flipped out cat
> He's a platinum canary, drinkin' Falstaff beer. Mercedes rule, and a rented leer.
> Bottom feeder insincere. Prophet lo-fi pioneer.
> Sell the house and go to school. Get a young girlfriend, daddy's jewel.

God's little gift is on the rag. Poster girl posing in a fashion mag
Canine, feline, Jekyll and Hyde? Wear your fake fur on the inside
Queen of south beach, aging blues. Dinner at six, wear your cement shoes
I thought you were singing your heart out to me. Your lips were syncing and
now I see..."

This penchant for depicting subjects who lead excessive or simply out-of-the-ordinary lives, using specific, realist descriptives can also be found in "Oh, Marie" (*Sheryl Crow*). The subject of this song is a woman who leads a lonely life, trying to fill it with meaningless sex. She is described as "all magazines and benzedrine and vodka", "wears teen perfume behind her knees", and is visually associated with "flowered drinks and [a] low-cut dress". Through connecting "Marie" with these kinds of images, Crow creates a picture of someone who is superficial and masking a void in her life. The crux of the song comes at the end of the last verse -- "There was one man she truly loved. He took everything but her bear-skin rug..." -- and the listener understands the chorus' rhetorical statement, "Oh Marie, I sure hope you're happy".

Most often, images are not just thrown together as meaninglessly as they are in "The Na-Na Song" (*Tuesday Night Music Club*). Images taken from a realistic look at life play a descriptive part in the story, as "Marie" demonstrates. For the most part, Crow's narrations are straightforward, not couched in symbolism or ambiguous imagery. The listener is not given a description of the emotions or feelings of the subject, but rather, a picture of the situation and the person/people involved. The listener is not necessarily invited to relate to or have empathy towards the situation or person. This is not surprising, considering many of the characters are out-of-the-ordinary: the fanatic who believes in the coming of aliens ("Maybe Angels" -- *Sheryl Crow*), the superstar ("Superstar" -- *Sheryl Crow*), or the stoned girlfriend ("If it makes you happy" -- *Sheryl Crow*). Consequently, the listener's role is more evaluative than the participatory as is the case in McLachlan's music.

Interesting character narratives in the third person do not comprise all of

Crow's subject material. She does deal with relationship, though the relationships are never void of tension. They are songs about tension and dissatisfaction, as in "Home" (*Sheryl Crow*):

> "I woke up this morning/Now I understand
> What it means to give your life/To just one man....
> When I was seventeen/Now I'm thirty-two
> And I can't remember what I'd seen in you
> I made a promise/Said it everyday
> Now I'm reading romance novels/And dreaming of yesterday...This is Home."

Betrayal is a subject taken up in "The Book":

> "I read your book/And I find it strange
> That I know that girl and I know her world a little too well
> And I didn't know/By giving my hand
> That I would be written down, sliced around, passed down among stranger's hands.
>
> You carry a pen and a paper and no time and no words you waste
> You're a voyeur/The worst kind of thief
> To take what happened to us
> To write down everything that went on between you and me..."

Broken relationship is also dealt with in "Can't Cry Anymore" (*Tuesday Night Music Club*). Instead of using poetic imagery, however, the subject of the story adopts a matter-of-fact tone in describing the facts of a relationship he or she just ended:

> "Took your car, drove to Texas
> Sorry, honey, But I suspected we were through
> And I can't cry anymore
> Since I left, Been feelin' better, 'cause that's
>
> What you get when you stay together too long
> And I can't cry anymore
>
> (Now I know that) Money comes in, But the fact is
> Not enough to pay my taxes

And I can't cry anymore..."

It is interesting to contrast this style of realist writing with a sample of McLachlan's poetic way of dealing with broken relationships:

"What ravages of spirit conjured this temptuos rage
Created you a monster broken by the rules of love
And fate has led you through it, You do what you have to do it...

I have the sense to recognize that I don't know how to let you go
Every moment marked with apparitions of your soul
I'm ever swiftly moving Trying to escape this desire...."
("Do what you have to do" – *Surfacing*)

In McLachlan's writing, it is the emotion that occupies center stage; in Crow's lyrics, it is the situation and the narrative. Since Crow's stories relate events, situation, and people involved, they do not usually get inside the consciousness of the persona of the song. This allows Crow to create an emotional distance from her listeners, although in a manner much different from McLachlan.

Image – moving beyond real life to star persona

In her first album, Sheryl Crow's image is situated in the real life she tells about -- the girl next door. The album jacket and contents show pictures of an old cement house, a subway station, a sign for a small town, a hotel sign, a dog, old cars, and various poses of Crow, all of which are in full color. One gets the feeling that Crow participates in "real" life. There is no room for the fanciful drawings that grace McLachlan's albums. Crow herself is pictured with minimal make-up in long flowing skirts with form-fitting shirts, or in jeans and a jean jacket. She presents herself as someone familiar, someone with whom we can be comfortable.

With her second album, however, a new persona of a brooding and possibly

fallen star emerges. Sheryl Crow is shown stepping out from an old travel trailer. A picture is created of someone who is trying to play the glamorous life but is living the hard life. Gone are the color photos, and in their place are black and white photos of a sullen, heavily made-up tramp. In most of the shots, Crow is wearing a black leather, seventies-style jacket, and on her finger rests a huge rectangular dark ring. She is also shown wearing shimmery stretch pants, glittery high-heeled sandals, and a sheer white blazer over a sequined bra top. Her hair is stringy, and her black-rimmed eyes and dark lipstick are retro mod.

This change in persona may indicate that Crow (with the possible influence of her record company) does not want to be identified with, but rather looked on as an outsider, just as we look at the characters in her stories from an outsider's point of view. This distance and aura of the "hard life" draws striking resemblance to her male icons in rock, such as the Rolling Stones and Rod Stewart. Image, as much as her music, illuminates where she may want to be placed within rock's lineage. This image is an attempt to carve a niche which is a "feminized" version of the classic rock star and musically intersects at many levels with what traditionally has been seen as a male domain (hard-edged rock which is bluesy and roots-oriented[7]).

A few women have successfully placed themselves within rhythm and blues rock[8] but they have done so by adopting an androgynous image. Unlike Chrissie Hynde or Joan Jett (who also belong to this "lineage"), Crow does not display an androgynous image or male stance. By her distinctly feminine yet multi-dimensional image, she places herself in rhythm and blues rock without relinquishing control over portraying herself as a woman, an act that has so frequently accompanied this stylistic practice.

Eclectic...but rooted in rhythm & blues

It is Sheryl Crow's music more than image, however, that positions her within

rhythm and blues rock style. Her chord progressions, vocal style, melody lines, and instrumentation all contribute to this style. Like most rhythm and blues rock, much of Crow's music is constructed over a repeated bass line – a groove which underlies the whole song, determining the "feel" of the song. The chordal pattern, which the bass outlines, is therefore often the same in the chorus as in the verse, with deviations from this bass line occurring at bridge sections. The other indicator of rhythm and blues is the use of "blue notes" – the flattened third and seventh -- not only in the vocal line but also in the chordal structures.

Examples of the flattened third and seventh tones, as well as riff-based music, are easily found among Crow's repertoire. "Hard to make a Stand" (*Sheryl Crow*) is based on the riff I-V-IV (♩ ♩ 𝅘𝅥𝅯 𝅘𝅥𝅯), and the chorus is punctuated by the flat seventh. "Everyday is a Winding Road" (*Sheryl Crow)* is based on the progression of I-bIII-IV-bIII-I. The riff which underlies "Maybe Angels" (Ex.4) outlines the blues scale (major scale, except with flattened third and seventh tones). More predominantly rhythmic riffs can be seen in "Can't Cry Anymore" (Ex.5) and "Sweet Rosalyn" (Ex.6). "Love is a Good Thing" and "Superstar" (both from *Sheryl Crow*) are based on i-iii-IV and I-iii-IV riffs with different bridges (V-bVII-i and IV-bVI-I respectively). The latter song also uses a repeating riff using the fifth and flat seventh, which appears in the piano in the verse and in the Wurlitzer in the chorus.

In her instrumentation and vocal style, Crow draws from eclectic stylistic practices, but she remains within a rhythm and blues tradition. Both "Love is a Good Thing" and "Superstar" use a seventies funk style, employing the wah guitar and a vocal style which characteristically slides off notes at the ends of phrases. At times, Crow also uses country music instrumentation. Apart from the accordion, an instrument she often plays in her live shows, Crow uses the slide guitar, a defining instrument of country music. The song "Home" demonstrates a laid-back country feel reinforced by slide guitar, but keeping within the rhythm and blues rock style, Crow emphasizes the flat seventh (which epitomizes blues sound), played periodically by the

bass (c-d-e flat in the key of F major). Likewise, the hit single, "If It Makes You Happy", makes use of country-sound guitars, but only to add color. The guitar riff I-ii/I which begins the song and continues through most of the verse, sets the tone. Crow's vocals never adopt the familiar country nasal twang.

"We Do What We Can" (*Tuesday Night Club*) and "Ordinary Morning" (*Sheryl Crow)* work within a jazz style. The former song utilizes traditional jazz chords (eleventh), solo trumpet parts, 6/8 meter, and soft, soulful vocals. The latter song, however, attempts to meld jazz, rock, and funk styles. Though the verses stay within a jazz style, the chorus turns towards rock and funk. The voice moves from soft and sultry to hard and almost screaming, reminiscent of Lenny Kravitz. The piano transforms its aimless amble around seventh and eleventh chords into pounding rock chords.

Because so much of Sheryl Crow's music is based on riffs, her chord progressions are typically quite short and repetitious, a typical feature of rhythm and blues rock. Riff-based songs, such as "A Change" (*Sheryl Crow*), employ this general chord progression -- most of the verses and the chorus move between chords I and V on alternating measures. The second part of each verse varies somewhat, using the chord progression IV-(V at times inserted here)- I or VI-IV-I. The traditional twelve-bar blues pattern is apparent in this structure. "All I Wanna Do" (*Tuesday Night Music Club*) remains extremely simple, using a I-bVI-bVII progression, inserting chord IV only at the last part of each verse. The chordal progression I-IV-ii-V runs through the entirety of "Leaving Las Vegas" (*Tuesday Night Music Club*).

In other songs, the progressions are still relatively straightforward rock progressions. In "If It Makes you Happy" (*Sheryl Crow*) the verse uses the progression of I-V-I-IV-V, while the chorus uses ii-IV-I-V. Crow frequently uses the bVI and bVII chords, as is exemplified in "What I Can Do for You" (i -IV-bVI-bVII-i) (*Tuesday Night Music Club*) and "Ordinary Morning" (vi-bVI; ii-V-IV-bVII; I- bVI-bVII-I). In fact, about half of her songs contain some combination of the bVI and bVII

chords.

Vocal style

Sheryl Crow's melodic lines are also based in rhythm and blues rock. There are many songs which not only employ the flattened third and seventh, but also employ a melody built strictly around the blues scale. The chorus of "A Change" (*Sheryl Crow*) and the verse of "Maybe Angels" (*Sheryl Crow*) and "Run, Baby, Run" (*Tuesday Night Music Club*) feature the flat third, while the verse of "Sweet Rosalyn" (*Sheryl Crow*) is set almost exclusively on the flat seventh. "Superstar" (*Sheryl Crow*) and "All I Wanna Do" (*Tuesday Night Music Club*) are both built around the flat third and the flat seventh.

The other relevant characteristic of Crow's melodic lines is their limited range, demonstrating the influence of speech. In this sense, Crow has a more "masculine" way of singing. Although I realize that this is a rather generalizing kind of statement to make, there are enough examples to support it as such, leaving room for the many exceptions. Take, for example, women like Aretha Franklin (soul/gospel), Joni Mitchell (folk), and Janis Joplin (rock), who sing in a much broader range than is typical for their male contemporaries and stylistic companions, James Brown, Bob Dylan, and the Rolling Stones.

Examples of songs with limited note ranges abound. The verse and chorus of "Sweet Rosalyn" (*Sheryl Crow*) both have four-note ranges and slide off notes at the ends of phrases (Ex.7). "Run, Baby, Run" (*Tuesday Night Music Club*) stays within a six-note range, while "Strong Enough" (*Tuesday Night Music Club*) is contained within five notes. Even when the melodies do extend beyond a limited range, there is often much repetition on one or two notes, giving the effect of speech (Ex.8).

The other way speech is affected, is by syllabic or non-mellismatic singing (i.e., one syllable per note). Crow rarely stretches one syllable over more than one note.

This can be seen in the example of "Sweet Rosalyn" above, as well as in "Redemption Day" (Ex.9) which also shows much repetition on a single note.

Sometimes, Crow uses the two techniques above in combination with following the natural inflections and intonations of speech. Examples of Crow's *Sprechtstimme* style can be found in "Superstar" and in the verses of "What I Can Do For You" and "All I Wanna Do" (*Tuesday Night Music Club*).

The other aspect to consider is the more specific details of Crow's vocal production. Crow sings in an almost deliberately untrained way, a manner of singing which is typical of rock music in general. The ideology which underlies this is one of authenticity -- "natural" expression is possible when the singer expresses him/herself from the soul, without the interference of professional training (Moore 1993: 42). This can manifest itself practically in a variety of ways, from a lack of or very minimal use of vibrato, to scooping up to, or sliding off a note, to deliberately straining the voice and distorting a vocal timbre (listen to the hedonistic scream on "Love is a Good Thing" -- *Sheryl Crow*). Crow also uses a more nasal tone than McLachlan. This vocal style is especially apparent on her first album (listen in particular to "Leaving Las Vegas"), but this style is also exaggerated in "Redemption Day" off the newest album.

Instrumentation

Crow's instrumentation emphasizes her eclectic music style. Crow is herself a bass guitar, guitar, accordion, and piano/keyboard player and plays on all her songs. As already mentioned, she frequently uses slide guitar and accordion to create a country music feel. Jazz piano is found on two of her songs. There is, however, a strong guitar sound in almost all her music which -- with the bass, electric, and acoustic guitars playing the basic riffs which underlie the music -- is typical for rhythm and blues rock.

Keyboards also contribute to the eclecticism. The Hammond organ is used

quite frequently and has different functions. Sometimes it is used to evoke a gospel/soul sound, as in the cliched parts it plays in "A Change" (*Sheryl Crow*). The Hammond organ also evokes sounds from 1960s psychedelic rock (i.e., The Doors), which also illuminates the connection Crow makes with this era in the anti-war "Redemption Song" (*Sheryl Crow*).

Drawing from a mix of stylistic practices allows Crow to create something unique, even while it echoes its sources. By mixing the cliched gospel Hammond sound with a more guitar-driven rock, or with an upbeat pop style ("Everyday is a Winding Road" -- *Sheryl Crow*), Crow creates a new place for this instrument. For example, her use of the Hammond organ sounds particularly fresh in the introduction to the catchy pop tune, "All I Wanna Do" (*Tuesday Night Music Club*). The setting of a variety of instruments drawn from many music styles in new ways is an important part of what characterizes her sound.

Crow similarly makes use of a variety of instruments not commonly found in rock music, to create interesting and unique sounds. Of particular interest is the use of a fuzz bass solo in "A Change" (*Sheryl Crow*) and a Wurlitzer bass solo in "The Book" (*Sheryl Crow*). In the latter song, the horns and strings are arranged rather unusually to create a slow 1920s dance-hall style. The use of the pennyosley and longhorn guitar creates an eerie effect in "Redemption Day" (*Sheryl Crow*). Another instrument, the dobro, is used to color "Sweet Rosalyn" (*Sheryl Crow*).

Audience reception

As we have seen, Sheryl Crow prefers a mode of articulation which involves presenting herself as a rock "star" in the tradition of Bruce Springsteen and the Rolling Stones. This ego trip was obvious to fans who observed her in concert. Crow opened for the Rolling Stones in her most recent tour (in which she covered a song of another male superstar icon group -- Led Zeppelin), and personal observations of the tour were

available off web-sites dedicated to Crow. The following comment indicates an observer's perception that Crow desires to play out the role of "star": "That Sheryl Crow enjoys playing live is obvious....she likes getting attention...she likes showing everybody how many instruments she can play" (Weiber 1997). An online biography of Crow sums up Crow's image transformation from 1994 to 1997: "[Sheryl Crow's] new re-birth is more a reflection of her new rock star life than her suburban roots" (Damiani 1997). It is clear to fans that Crow lives out the image she began to portray with her second album – the female counterpart to the male archetype of rock "superstar". As a testament to the parallels that are drawn (by herself and by others) between herself and classic male rockers, the recurring statement among fans is that Sheryl Crow "knows how to rock" (which may be a surprise, given that she's a woman in a field dominated by male rockers such as Mick Jagger, Steve Tyler and Bruce Springsteen).

Crow is also known for her alliance with various social causes, however, and she is able to create an acceptable balance between playing the rock star and the humanitarian, combining a strong ego with an appealing sense of political-mindedness. Drawing from a tradition of both "bad boys" (Rolling Stones) and the sensitive political spokesperson (Bob Dylan), she creates a multi-dimensional image, which is expressed both visually and audibly. As The Boston Globe acknowledged, she is "committed to social causes: from planning a concert to fight scleroderma to her stance against Walmart for its censorship policies" (Morse 1997a). Crow states in another review that she likes to "hook people in with a sound that feels great, and then hit them" with a message (Caulfield 1996). In a culture where so much music competes for attention, her catchy tunes succeed in capturing the consciousness of the mainstream rock audience, appealing to this audience by drawing from a variety of stylistic practices, yet targeting a specific taste culture[9] -- classic rock.

Conclusion

Sheryl Crow has developed a distinctive style by creating dialogues with the past. This dialogue begins with her vocals, instrumentation, and musical form, which are rooted in rhythm and blues, following specific trajectories of rhythm and blues rock tracing back as far as Howlin' Wolf to the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin. This harder rhythm and blues style is lightened and diversified by her inclusion of musical stylistic practices outside the tradition of rock. While her instrumental and stylistic diversities do not set her apart as a distinctly female artist (as her image does), they set her apart as a creative and distinctive rock act.

Crow's gender plays a greater role in her image. She mimics the "hard-living" star image which can be seen in her male role models. Instead of the adoption of male postures and costuming (as was the case for Heart, Susi Quatro, and Chrissie Hynde), Crow sets up a distinctly feminine counterpart. As I have described, her clothes are meant for the female sex. She prefers more gentle performance mannerisms than her male counterparts -- there is no aggressive prancing around the stage, no phallic gesturing with the guitar or microphone stand. She makes the female body congruent with the hard rocker image: in her interview in the "Women-in-Rock" issue of *Rolling Stone*, the accompanying photograph shows her from the waist up, nude except for a cowgirl hat and her long hair covering her breasts (Hamilton 1997: 109).[10]

As an entertainer, Crow captures the attention of the listener through story-telling – relaying descriptive, realist narratives through song. As with image, this narration style in lyrics can be found in her professed musical roots. There are many such examples in the Rolling Stones: "Play with Fire", "Sympathy for the Devil", "Get off of my Cloud", "19th Nervous Breakdown" (see discography).

As a female artist following this rhythm and blues rock tradition, there is a decidedly different approach to dealing with sexual relations. The lyrics bands such as the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin frequently talk about sexual desire and tension

and sex as a source of pleasure and fun (Led Zeppelin: "Whole Lotta Love", "The Lemon Song"; the Rolling Stones: "Brown Sugar", "Let's Spend the Night Together"). One of the only times Crow deals explicitly with sex is in the song "What I can do for You" which deals with the misuse of a man's power to get sex, a much different perspective on the sex act. The Rolling Stones' "Honkey Tonk Women" talks about the different women the persona of the song has slept with. Compare this to Crow's "Marie" about a girl who also "sleeps around", but instead of being about conquest, the song underlines the futility and unhappiness of one-night stands and exposes the reason for such behavior as the hurt of betrayal from a previous relationship.[11]

The rhythm and blues rock tradition has not found many females who have challenged the masculine image and sexual perspective. Crow, however, is one musician who presents a distinctively female image and a female perspective to relationships (particularly sexual relationships). Although she embraces the rhythm and blues as a stylistic practice, she also challenges many assumptions within this male-dominated tradition.

IV. Sinead O'Connor – Developing Style through Authenticity

In contrast to Crow, who tells stories in an impersonal manner, Sinead O'Connor lays down a devastatingly bare account of personal struggle and growth. O'Connor's albums allow the listener a glimpse of her personality and issues with which she is concerned. As an Irish artist, she has created a personal and political identity out of baring her life journey and maintaining strong political stances. She addresses different levels of politics -- from the misuse of power in the home, to issues of power and control in the government (particularly those of Ireland and Great Britain) and religion (Roman Catholic Church).

Personal and political exposure result in an ideology of authenticity that is the primary means through which O'Connor articulates the components of her musical style. This ideology of authenticity is found in O'Connor's political convictions, image, identity as an Irish woman, vocal style, and performance gestures. Her musical style has a unique place in rock music, one that attempts to extend the boundaries of identity and musical form particularly through gender.

Political alliances

O'Connor is best known to the public as the bald woman who tore up a picture of the Pope on television.[12] This was done as an act of defiance against what she perceived to be the "sins of organized religion" (Morse 1997). She also caused an uproar when she refused to sing at Garden State Arts Center in New Jersey as the American national anthem was played during the time of the Gulf War (Fein 1996: 56). Demonstrators in New York City piled her records high and crushed them by a tank. Although she received four Grammy nominations in 1991, she would not attend the Grammy Awards ceremonies, stating she did not agree with the values of the music industry (London Times 1997). Wherever she goes, she tends to stir controversy and

strong reaction by making controversial political statements.

Her strongest political convictions concern issues of peace among and within countries (particularly Ireland and Israel) and victimization, particularly in the form of racism or child abuse. O'Connor aligns herself with and supports causes which further the work of peace and the end of victimization. She has performed for Amnesty International in 1990 (Chile) and 1992 (England). In 1991, she played live and recorded a single with the proceeds going to the Kurdish Refugee Appeal. In 1992, she recorded for a "Peace Together" project in Dublin and sang "Make me a Channel of Your Peace" at a Dublin Peace Rally in 1993. She contributed a song for "In the Name of the Father", a film about the injustice committed against Gerry Conlon, a member of the IRA. She appeared on a BBC television program about child abuse, giving a lengthy interview on her own experiences (October 30, 1996). Most recently, she composed and performed original music for the play "Remembrance", written by an Irish playwright, which concerned the violence in Northern Ireland (Newswire 1997).

Personal experience and conviction infiltrate all levels of O'Connor's musical production. Her unique voice, message, and musical form create a musical style which is difficult to position within mainstream rock music. It is her originality and personal, forceful delivery, combined with the ability to retain enough of a "hook"[13] in her music (until recently) that has made her an international commercial success for over a decade.

Image – the punk, the victim, the mother

The two aspects of O'Connor's musical presentation which are particularly striking are her voice and her image. These elements have both political, as has already been discussed, and physical sides to which we will now turn. On her first album, *The Lion and the Cobra* (1987), O'Connor appeared on the cover, arms crossed across her chest, her head shaved bald. The bolder U.K. album cover depicted O'Connor with her

head raised in a scream. The fact that O'Connor was bald is particularly pertinent as there had been no bald women in mainstream rock music up to this time (other than a few punk acts). It is even more relevant that O'Connor apparently shaved her head as a deliberate act of defiance against her record company upon receiving pressure from them to promote her album using a sexual image (Gaar 1992: 393).

By shaving her head, O'Connor directed her audience (and her record company) away from the image of sex object. By confronting and contradicting repressive female representation in rock music, she urged them to invest in the issues which she finds important. The visual constructs that have surrounded O'Connor centered on her bald head, which became a symbol of defiance against anything that undermined integrity and honesty. The majority of publicity photos focus on her face alone, her wide eyes and naked head exuding honesty and innocence. Her apparel is not glamorous, whether it be tank tops and jeans with black work boots of the earlier days of her career or the casual clothes of sweat-suits, simple, peasant-style dresses, skirts, and blouses that she now wears. Her more recent image has softened as she has grown her hair back and her portrayal of herself as a mother has become more explicit.

The only other artwork associated with her albums and other promotional material are simple drawings done by O'Connor, which unlike McLachlan's fanciful artwork, send more obvious messages. The cover of *Universal Mother* depicts a human figure being held up by the arms of another in a starry sky. The drawing on the CD single cover, "My Special Child" (refugee donation CD), is of two open red hands holding a white hand which contains a stick drawing of a crying girl, all of which are contained inside a stick drawing of O'Connor. This latter drawing is especially poignant in symbolizing the connection O'Connor feels with her own hurt to the plight of a refugee child, a victim of violence and the unjustness of political systems.

Identity as an Irish woman

If there is any single identifying facet of O'Connor's image and music, it is her political and personal identity as an Irish woman and her resulting concern for the history and the future of the people of Ireland. She is considered to have "distinguished herself as being a prime force in advancing Irish rock music, using hip-hop rhythm and rap vocal inflections" (Boyd 1997). She has also collaborated with other Irish artists on a CD of Irish tunes in 1996. The music of her last album, *Gospel Oak*, displays the deepest alliance with Irish folk music so far, culminating in an arrangement of a traditional Irish folk song, and the addition of an "authentic-sounding" vocalized jig at the end of the album.[14] The music written for the 1997 play, "Remembrance", draws upon "sean-nos, an ancient Irish music that features a capella singing in Gaelic and English" (Newswire 1997).

The most immediate Celtic associations O'Connor's music makes is through the instrumental arrangements. These associations can already be found on *The Lion and the Cobra*. One can hear the Celtic rhythms in the percussion in the chorus of "Mandinka" or the staccato piping of the pan flute in a verse of "Just Like U said it would B". The lilting tag, "Lai, Lai, Lai....", of the latter song is unmistakably Irish (Ex.10), as is the swirling melody over the drone in "Never Get Old" (Ex.11).

This Irish "sound" continues in following albums. Note, for example, the Celtic fiddling at the end of "I am stretched on your Grave" (*The Lion and the Cobra*). "In This Heart" is an *a capella* arrangement featuring the Irish trio Voice Squad (*Universal Mother)*. The folk idiom is evoked in the use of accordion throughout *Gospel Oak*, as well as the curious mix of national folk styles (Spanish guitar and Celtic flute) with sampled sounds, such as at the end of "My Love".

The association with Irish mythology is also heard in O'Connor's musical style and is perhaps most clearly evident in "Never Get Old" (*The Lion and the Cobra*). In this song, Enya (a contemporary Irish singer) recites Celtic poetry (in Gaelic) in an introduction which is set against a backing drone, and later, against O'Connor's

wailing vocalizing. The drone which begins the piece goes through almost its entirety; the melody pitched above is based on the dorian mode (i.e., natural minor scale with the sixth degree raised). The background vocals emphasize the syncopated melody line and lend an ancient feel to the song. Although a partial written transcription is provided (Ex.10), the song must be heard to appreciate fully the nuances in shape and timbre of the melodic line – details which are extremely difficult to notate.

The albums

Because O'Connor's albums display a personal journey, they will be dealt with in chronological order. Even upon listening through the first track of the first album, one is left with the impression that she wears all emotion on her sleeve. Her voice is raw and unpredictable and is characterized by unique mannerisms. Her peculiar mix of musical genres, particularly Irish folk music, mixed with her emotive vocal style and defiant punk-like image, defies categorization. When her debut album came out (1987), it was marketed and received as post-punk, despite its many dance/pop influences (Powers 1997: 378).

The lyrical content and the poetic nature of the lyrics sets O'Connor's music far from punk. Although the effect of raw emotional intensity of her vocal style does bear similarity to punk vocals, her music has strong folk roots and makes connections with Irish culture and mythology. Her first album has Irish mythical associations as evidenced in the longest track of the album, "Troy", and in the opening track, "Jackie", which is about a ghost (Jackie) who searches the shore for her lover who has been lost at sea.

O'Connor's political voice just begins to blossom on her debut album. On "Drink Before the War", the subject is chided for his/her apathy, "liv[ing] in a shell" and "building a wall": "nothing bothers you, Somebody cut out your eyes, you refuse to see. Someone cut out your heart and you refuse to feel". The subject denies the possibility of war while the persona in the chorus urges, "Listen to the man in the

liquor store yelling 'anybody want a drink before the war?'"

O'Connor's predilection for relating political injustice to injustices or wrong-doing in personal relationships can already be seen on this album. In "Jerusalem", this war-torn capital is paralleled to an uncertain relationship, nearing the brink of collapse. Similarly, mythical analogies are used to express the desire for past love in "Troy": "The phoenix from the flame, You will learn, you will rise, you'll return, being what you are. There is no other Troy for you to burn ....I'd kill a dragon for you."

The way O'Connor deals with relationships in her songs sets her apart from the artists already mentioned. In songs about a love relationship, the persona is rarely a passive player in the relationship. Even if the persona is being treated unfairly or is in some sense a victim, the persona is often aggressive. Sometimes, the persona, who is presumably female, makes sexual demands as in "I Want Your Hands on Me": "What I want, give me...I want you to come and please me; Put 'em on....me". In "Just Like U Said it would B", the subject demands "When I'm walking offstage... will you be my lover..mamma...babe...?" and one knows from the harsh tone she sings it with that she is not posing a question. Nor is there any hint of politeness or congeniality when she snarls, "Nothing would please me better that I find that you're there when I lay down my head at the end of my day". At other times, the subject is someone who obsesses over and confronts her past love as in "Troy". In "Just Call Me Joe", the subject has a love affair with a stranger, and does not allow him to even know her name.

This is unusual treatment of a female in a relationship in a rock song, especially for 1987 (with the exception of some of the song material of Madonna and Cyndi Lauper). The underlying premise is that power, traditionally seen as a male domain, is claimed by the female who aggressively demands fulfillment -- sexual or otherwise. O'Connor expresses this aggressiveness not only in lyrics, but also in the way she sings, making her demands by snarling or shouting. In this way, she works against traditional views of gender relations in rock music that see the man as the aggressor who expects the woman to fulfill his needs (see "My Obsession" by the Rolling Stones).

The next album, *I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got* (1990), delves deeper into O'Connor's personal issues. In "You Cause as Much Sorrow," O'Connor reveals the trauma caused by her abusive mother:

> "...Why must you always be around?
> Why can't you just leave it be?
> It's done nothing so far but destroy my life
> You cause as much sorrow dead
> As you did when you were alive..."

A break-up with a boyfriend is dealt with in "The Last Day of our Acquaintance":

> "...I know you don't love me any more
> you used to hold my hand when the plane took off
> Two years ago there just seemed so much more
> And I don't know what happens to our love
>
> Today's the day our friendship has been stale
> And we will meet later to finalize the details
> Two years ago the seed was planted
> And since then you have taken me for granted..."

Motherhood, a theme which will be continually expanded upon in the following albums, is evident in this album as well. O'Connor sings of her miscarriages, a subject which was rarely broached at the time, in "Three Babies". In the chorus of "The Emperor's New Clothes", she speaks frankly about pregnancy:

> "..If I treated you mean
> I really didn't mean to
> But you know how it is
> And how a pregnancy can change you."

O'Connor has helped paved the way for other female rock artists to be more public about their experience as mothers, both in their image and in their song-writing. Artists such as Chrissie Hynde, Kirstin Hersh, Kim Gordon, Patti Smith, and Courtney Love all deal with motherhood now, a subject which is "hardly the stuff of which

rock's fantasies of sexual freedom and sensual fulfillment are made" (Powers 1997: 379). O'Connor even began a Lollapalooza tour pregnant, although she had to cancel because of nausea.

While she often breaks down the boundaries of traditional female image and behavior in rock music, O'Connor also exhibits a negative side of the cultural stereotype of female nature -- that of emotional dependence and submission. In "Jump in the River", she sings: "...And if you said 'Jump in the river' I would because it would probably be a good idea..."

Although she does expose a more vulnerable side, the overall impression of the second album is that the persona is gaining a new-found independence and strength. In "Feel so Different", the persona reflects, "...The whole time I'd never seen that all I'd need was inside me. Now I feel so different..." and in the title track, "...I'm walking through the desert and I am not frightened although it's hot. I have all that I requested and I do not want what I haven't got..."

O'Connor's political voice comes through clearly on "Black Boys on Mopeds" which criticizes the Thatcher government and takes a hard look at racism in England. The one photo inside the album cover is of a black couple in front of a poster of Colin Roach, who was murdered by police, with a caption underneath, reading "God's place is the world but the world is not God's place". O'Connor makes no apologies for her political and personal convictions in "The Emperor's New Clothes". The following line gets considerable vocal emphasis in live performance:

> "...I will have my own policies.
> I will sleep with a clear conscience
> I will sleep in peace..."

The next album, *Universal Mother* (1994), moves even farther away from traditional rock subjects and form to explore the motherhood theme more fully, and use musical structures that are more closely aligned with folk music. As the album title implies, O'Connor expands motherhood from personal experience to encompass

images of earth mother and goddess. The opening page of the album notes contains the "Charge of the Goddess". The photo depicts the "spinning dance" which is a prayer for the mother, taken from the film, "Full Circle". The inside back cover shows O'Connor embracing her young son.

O'Connor again returns to the subject of her abusive mother in "Fire on Babylon":

> "She took my father from my life
> Took my sister and brothers, oh
> I watched her torturing my child
> Feeble I was then but now I'm grown..."

This song is followed by two tender songs of a mother's love for her child, "John, I Love You" and "My Darling Child". Her son, Jake Reynolds, is given a place on the album with a little unaccompanied song of his own making, "Am I a Human?" In "All Babies", O'Connor suggests another creation myth involving a universal mother:

> "All babies are flown from the Universe.
> From there they're lifted by the hands of angels.
> God gives them the stars to use as ladders.
> She hears their calls, She is mother and father..."

It is interesting that in an album written predominantly about children and mothering, the persona (the mother, which suggests O'Connor herself) presents a strong survival instinct that is protective of herself against abuse. This side is stated in extremely harsh terms, using the metaphor of an animal – which the persona is not in a literal sense but models in a protective sense – as well as juxtaposing the image of a football (and consequently, kicking) with parts of the female body:

> "...I'm not no animal in the zoo; I'm not no whipping boy for you
> You may not treat me like you do; I'm not no animal in the zoo
> My skin is not a football for you; My head is not a football for you
> My body's not a football for you; My womb is not a football for you
> My heart is not a football for you; I'm not no animal in the zoo

This animal will jump up and eat you; I'm not no animal in the zoo
And I've every intention of leaping up and getting you."

This is followed by a sadistic, sneering repetitive melodic line on "Lalalalala....

Outright political statements are kept to one track, "Famine". This song is a hip-hop piece which contains a rather lengthy exposition on O'Connor's view that Ireland's history of oppression can be equated to child abuse and that domestic child abuse results from the Irish people's frustration of not knowing the truth of their history (Newswire 1997).

In the latest album, *Gospel Oak* (1997), there is a departure from the harsh, accusative tone that O'Connor had used to voice her political views, to a more gentle, mothering perspective. The album is dedicated to "the people of Israel, Rwanda and Northern Ireland". Following that dedication is a thirteen-line poem which could be considered a prayer for light and love to work in the hearts and minds of men so that the plan and purpose of the earth would be restored. Although one would not ascertain this solely from the lyrics, O'Connor wrote "Petit Poulet" about the Rwandan crisis, as she stated in an interview: "I wanted to write something which would be comforting to the children that went through the evil that happened there" (O'Connor 1997). The violent situation in Northern Ireland provided the scenario for "My Love". The previous year, she had written a "Letter to the Editor" of the Irish Times in response to the same situation (O'Connor 1996). She made clear her views on the crisis in the same interview: "Violence has ...shut a lot of people up who would be speaking out more if...we had a right to govern our own country". O'Connor holds onto her political convictions but, at least in her music, she is content to work them out in a quieter way, working for peace in familial relationship, rather than through public confrontation.

What prevails throughout this album is the mother image, which is broadened to include the idea of a universal mother figure who brings comfort and peace to the world. "This is to Mother You" (dedicated to new daughter, Roisin) reflects this multi-

dimensional image. The song also carries a messianic tone (note in particular lines 3-5):

> "This is to mother you; to comfort you and get you through...
> All the pain that you have known
> All the violence in your soul
> All the 'wrong' things you have done
> I will take from you when I come
> All mistakes made in distress
> All your unhappiness
> I will take away with my kiss
> I will give you tenderness..."

Echoing the Old Testament description of who Jehovah is ("I AM that I AM") the song "I am enough for myself", proclaims, "I am that am I".

O'Connor's albums give expression to personal life experiences both in the music and in the lyrics. The first albums were a way of working through the emotional pain of her childhood and broken relationships. As she states, "All I ever wanted to do when I wrote songs was to discover myself...(they are) diaries of an adult survivor of child abuse" (Graham 1995). Subsequent albums showed an increased mellowing, which has been largely a result of motherhood, and this is reflected in the gentler lyrics, acoustic arrangements, and relaxed rhythms. As O'Connor confirms, "they're all songs about Ireland and they're also love songs and lullabies, and they're also obviously about me" (Morse 1997). Musically and ideologically, one reviewer describes *Gospel Oak* in the following statement: "She celebrates motherhood and the feminine principle in new songs that have more of a lullaby lilt than a rock beat. She wants to be a force of healing rather than conflict" (Morse 1997).

Formal and harmonic structures

Many of the formal structures found in O'Connor's music offer rock music alternative models of form. The most obvious way in which she extends notions of

form is through her increasing alignment with Irish folk song, and for that matter, traditional folk song in general. Affinity with traditional folk song (as opposed to popular folk music) is apparent from the beginning of her career (*The Lion and the Cobra*). O'Connor explores the folk song structure in a variety of ways. "Jackie" is in AABBAB form with no chorus, deviating from the verse-chorus structures of traditional rock songs. While "Never Get Old" is again in simple strophic form, "Troy" is a more complex, almost epic poem of human emotion. It is comprised of an improvised strophic form, punctuated by silence at one point in the narrative, and ends with a slightly accelerating section in which the lyrics assess the situation which has been described, and finally culminate in accusations.

O'Connor's harmonic material is limited, in keeping with the simple structure. The harmonies are usually simple and repetitive, even for rock music. Listing only some examples, "Jackie" uses the chord progression of I-V-bVII-I and "Jerusalem" plays i with vi and bVI in the verses, while the chorus vacillates between ii and iv. "Drink before the War" is built on the progression of a bVI-bVII-I and "Troy" only contains chords i, bVII, and III. Several songs on the second album use only one chord ("I am Stretched on your Grave" and "I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got"). Half the songs on *Universal Mother* and over half on *Gospel Oak* use only one or two chords per song.

Almost half of the songs on the second album are in strophic form, and one of those is *a capella*. The last two albums sound even more folk-like -- melodies and harmonies become more simple and repetitive and the instrumentation brings the piano, acoustic guitar, and strings into greater prominence, and percussion and electric guitar less so. Again, O'Connor frequently uses strophic form as in "A Perfect Indian", "In this Heart", and "Thank You for Hearing Me", sometimes varying the stanzas by changes to the melodic line and instrumentation (listen to "John, I Love You").

O'Connor simplifies even strophic form, however, particularly in her lullaby songs. "My Darling Child" consists of two short melodic lines, each over one chord. The interest is generated by the ever-changing instrumentation. Likewise, "All Babies"

consists of only one melodic line, which is only slightly varied, over two chords. Variety and interest derives from the following: the progression of i to either ii or V6, the addition of percussion half-way through, two musical interludes with vocalized melody, a contrasting coda, and vocal inflection.

Another example of experimentation with rock music form occurs in "Red Football" with its two-part form (both parts based on I-V). The first section is in quasi-recitative style with the piano accompaniment providing the skeletal chordal structure (I-V6-I-V) underneath an *ad libitum* vocal part. The second section distinguishes itself from the first by its increased rhythmic vitality, its contrasting repetitive melodic line, and a more emphatic vocal style.

O'Connor also works with a four-line strophe which contains only one line repeated four times, as in the *a capella* "Tiny Grief Song" (*Gospel Oak*). This song is a deeply personal reminiscence made more so by the simple directness that results from its unique form and O'Connor's sorrowful voice:

> "I'd a terrible broken heart (4x)
> You were born on the day my mother was buried (4x)
> My grief, my grief, my grief, my grief (4x)"

"Thank You for Hearing Me" (*Gospel Oak*) is another personal testament which, for the most part, repeats one lyric line over the four melodic lines which occur within a strophe:

> "Thank you for hearing me (4x)
> Thank you for loving me (4x) Thank you for seeing me (4x)
> And for not leaving me (4x).."

The above discussion demonstrates how O'Connor mixes traditional Irish folk song into a rock tradition by using its simple strophic form. By utilizing the barest of chordal progressions, she is also echoing punk tradition, especially when her voice also uses particular vocal effects associated with punk music as in "Troy".

Besides mixing traditional folk song and punk practice, there is a more

fundamental way in which O'Connor meddles with rock form. The familiar formula of rock song structure has been described as "tension/explosion" structure which is evidenced in the 'verse-chorus' structure of most "male" rock (Reynolds and Press 1995: 356).[15] Strophic form can counteract this tension-release pattern, but there are more striking instances in O'Connor's music which provide an alternative to "phallic" rock.

The two songs I am referring to are "Troy" and "All Apologies" (*Universal Mother*). The latter is a remake of a song by Kurt Cobain of the band Nirvana. The song displays the characteristic verse-chorus structure and Nirvana's recording, in typical grunge style, is heavy with electric guitars, driving rhythm section, and hard-edged vocals. O'Connor's cover version, on the other hand, erases all traces of tension and release by keeping a cool approach to the entire song. She is accompanied only by an acoustic guitar, and her vocals remain soft -- almost weak. Instead of resignation or anger, the tone in her version is timid and vulnerable.

The second example of tampering with the tension-release formula in rock is "Troy", an original piece which is not propelled by tension and release but is in a constant state of flux. In a discussion about Patti Smith's attempts to create a "non-phallic" rock, Reynolds and Press affirm her success at being able to create rock music which is "organized around endless crescendos" – "simplistic rock'n'roll repetition accumulating into an overwhelming gush and rush of sound... like an ocean" (Reynolds and Press 1995: 356-57). "Troy" demonstrates this same kind of multi-climatic movement of ebb and flow which will be discussed in the following section.

Vocal style

The most distinctive element of O'Connor's presentation is way she uses her voice to portray each song. More than any other vocalist I have heard, O'Connor enters into her lyrics in a strikingly personal way. Her voice ranges from faint delicacy to harsh snarls to piercing shrieks. Because of this, O'Connor's songs become more

than an impression or a simple narration as with McLachlan and Crow – they become a dramatization of a particular persona's life journey, strongly suggesting her own. Her voice illuminates her experience of working through the emotional pain of her youth to forgiveness and understanding that comes from maturing and a new perspective as a mother. The distinctiveness of O'Connor's vocal style is most noticeable in the first few albums, displaying the kind of daring that causes many to suggest placing her categorically in alternative rock rather than other popular music forms (Powers 1997: 378).

There are several distinctive characteristics about O'Connor's singing that have become her trademarks. One is the use of leaping fifths, sixths, or octaves, using a different head voice for each register. Examples of this are found on *The Lion and the Cobra*: in the chorus of "Mandinka" and "Nothing Compares With U" (Ex.12), "Jerusalem" (Ex.13), and "Troy". Another pitch and vocal mannerism which is unique is ending on the minor or major second or minor third below a principle tone (Ex.14,15).

These vocal mannerisms combine with O'Connor's use of a variety of vocal timbres and techniques to convey the impression of forceful emotion that is characteristic of her music. This is exemplified in "Jerusalem" (*The Lion and the Cobra*), a song which refers to both political and inter-personal strife, which O'Connor's vocals express by taking on a hard, harsh quality. Her vocals employ a range of techniques, including imitation of speech with staccato lines on one or two tones, slurring tones into one another, falling off of tones, spoken words, sudden switch of registers, and harsh octave leaping. At other times she uses a soft, "little-girl" voice as on "Just Call Me Joe". On "Just like U said it would B" she makes use of three distinct voices: the first is her "normal" singing voice; the second is a snarling, harsh voice which begins abruptly, half-way through the last verse; the third voice begins at the last repetition of the chorus and is half-yelled and half-sung.

"Troy" is an example of O'Connor's ability to dramatize with her voice. She begins using a gentle, pleasant voice as she remembers when "they" were young: "I'll

remember it and Dublin in a rainstorm and sitting in the long grass in summer keeping warm..." The next section brings the situation between the lovers into the present ("I never meant to hurt you..") and O'Connor keeps her voice cool, punctuating the tension by a brief yell ("I swear"). The lyrics reveal that there is another woman and she asks huskily, "You love her? Was she good for you?". All pretension for control is gone when her voice begins to show anxiety -- "Does she hold you like I do?"-- and then dissolves into loud howls and moans.

Then, as if she remembers there might be hope, she pleads softly, "Do you want me?.." She ends this section almost whispering, "God, I love you" and then contrasts this with a burst of emotion yelling, "I'd kill a dragon for you. I'll die". After a break of silence she softly sings, "But I will rise, and I'll return..." She goes on to use a sinister, snarling voice: "The Phoenix from the flame. I will rise, and you'll see me return". The concluding sections use a steady beat and an increasingly busy instrumental arrangement, utilizing more strings, which propel the music and emotion forward.[16] O'Connor's impassioned and enraged voice continues with accusations, giving a short yell at times for impact.

In each successive album, there is a receding of this volatile vocal style. In the last two albums in particular, O'Connor seems to have found a more unified voice, one that is more consistent in timbre, tone, and register. Though she still uses her voice as a dramatic tool, she does so more subtly as in "Thank you for Hearing Me" (*Gospel Oak*). The vocal characteristics which made her distinctive at the beginning (wide leaps, multi-voices) are the very things she is now moving away from, reflecting a new personal space. The lullabies and gentle love songs are a far cry from the pained, angry lyrics of her earlier albums. As she stated in an interview with the Irish Times, she is "on the other side of recovery" (Boyd 1997). She revealed that she is now a Buddhist and this displays itself in a new "gentleness and reconciliation" in her writing (Boyd 1997).

O'Connor's voice can be considered to be part of her music's iconography. Drawing from Peirce (1991), Negus describes "*icons*" as having "a physical

resemblance to what they signify"; therefore, in popular music, icons can include not only the lyrics, but the expressions of the face and particular sounds created by the voice – "snarled words resemble and signify anger" (Negus 1996: 88). The use of different timbres along with the accompanying physical gestures can be seen as icons as they signify different moods and ways of being. The most obvious icon is exactly the example that Negus uses. O'Connor often adopts a snarling, sinister quality in her vocals. This style is visually confirmed in angry facial gestures that accompany this singing. It is exemplified in the way she articulates a line from "Jerusalem" in her live performance video *The Year of the Horse* (1990): "Getting tired of you doing this to me. I'm gonna hit you if you say that to me one more time."

Performance video

Three distinctive features of Sinead O'Connor as a musical artist -- her voice, her image, and the ideology of a political and personal authenticity arising from her investment in her Irish heritage -- are enacted visually, as well as acoustically. To discuss the visual articulation of these factors, I turn to *The Year of the Horse* (1990), the most recent of the two videos available of O'Connor's performances.

The focus of the video is entirely on concert footage of O'Connor. She has virtually no interaction with the rest of the band members, who can only be seen as silhouettes. The backdrop is made up simply of sheer curtains. The set is quite spare with only O'Connor's face in the spotlight. She is dressed entirely in black. The observer then, is directed to focus on the singer.

Because O'Connor's face is the prime spectacle, the observer's attention is drawn to her mouth, her voice, the lyrics she sings, and the way she sings them. Her face is dramatically involved in the emotion of the lyrics. Nothing she does detracts from the delivery of the lines. Her hands often circle around the microphone, as if she is attempting to help project her voice with her hands. She also uses her hands to imitate the various shapes and emphasize the longevity of various vocal gestures.

Emphasizing her identity as an Irish woman, she sings a traditional Irish folk song, *a capella*. On another song, O'Connor ends with an extended traditional Irish folk dance. Throughout the video, I, as an observer, was captivated by the intensity of emotion with which she delivered every line. I found myself "believing" in her authenticity of expression and it became for me a "hook" -- a device to attract and hold my attention.

Audience reception

The world seems to have rather mixed feelings about Sinead O'Connor and she presents more of an enigma than the preceding artists. O'Connor does not really fit any niche in rock or pop music in general, either in her music or her image. As Powers points out, O'Connor started off as a rebellious, angry youth who "didn't even fit that role properly, because at twenty-one she was also mother to a newborn baby boy" (Powers 1997: 377). She remains a leftist radical who has no clear political base, is known as an undiplomatic loudmouth, and is mocked by American pundits and critics (Powers 1997: 377).

People often react strongly to O'Connor. When she gave a live performance of Bob Marley's anti-racist anthem "War", it led to a demonstration against her in New York (Morse 1997). Shortly after her infamous scene of tearing up the Pope's picture she was "booed" off the stage at a Bob Dylan tribute concert before she got to sing. The media, and particularly the Irish press, have been ruthless with her in verbal attacks and vicious caricatures (even caricaturizing her recent pregnancy).

Most recently, she decided to appear in concert in Jerusalem under the title, "Two Capitals for Two States", a move which greatly upset the extreme political-right movements in Israel. O'Connor had to cancel the concert after receiving several death threats through the Irish Embassy in Israel (Gonen 1997). People were given a chance to express their opinions in regards to the situation on the Internet. Although some viewed O'Connor's actions positively, coming from a person who is committed to

working for peace, others did not think it was her place to make such a politically controversial statement. The Secretary General from "World Likud" submitted a piece which made the assumption that music and overt politicizing do not mix. He pointed to past folk artists whose politics were not specific or overt, but underpinned the music: "Think about Simon & Garfunkel or Bob Dylan whose concerts here never breathed a word of politics, but spread a message" (Sanders 1997).

O'Connor's defenders see her political acts as courageous and full of integrity (Wells 1997) and blame her declining popularity on people who cannot handle the force of her message, preferring something more "watered-down" (Arnold 1997). There is certainly something appealing about O'Connor's convictions although the ways in which she enacts them may repel as many people as they have drawn. Although O'Connor has been ridiculed with such titles as "Lunatic Genius", there is also a hint of admiration lurking behind such pronouncements. Despite some general annoyance with her impulsive, alienating acts, longevity at some level is expected, a London reporter from The Independent predicting that "some day your grandchildren will be asking about her" (Gilbery 1995).

In a recent review of O'Connor's release of her newest compilation album, *So Far...The Best of...Sinead O'Connor* (1997), Steven Wells considers the media's antagonism. He writes:

> Sinead's main crime is her 'madness', by which critics mean her tendency to wear her bleeding heart on her sleeve and to exorcise her inner demons through her work and in interviews. It's strange that Thom Yorke and Richey Edwards receive plaudits whilst Sinead was practically burnt at the stake. This is due partly to right-wing tabloid disgust at Sinead's politics but was undeniably compounded by brute sexism.

(Note the reviewer's attempt to denounce condemning views that womanhood is unstable and mentally deficient. Instead, he perceives O'Connor's actions to be admirable, that they show honesty and strength of character, and he hints that narrow-

minded reactionaries are only witch-hunting.)

What is relevant here is not whether O'Connor is in actual fact a raving lunatic or a person of strong political stance; it is obvious she elicits reactions that support both. What is significant is that an identity has been created by a complex set of diverse, yet often overlapping relationships among the media, fans, and O'Connor herself to such an extent as to place her creative output in that strategic location which creates controversy and therefore demands the loyalty of her fans. After a certain paper printed an (unproven) interview with O'Connor in which she allegedly apologized to the Pope for tearing up his picture, fans wrote online at various web-sites, greatly upset that she would renege on her stance. One fan stated that if the apology was indeed true (which he was sure it was not), it would change his "belief in Sinead" and that he "might even consider selling [his] record collection and remov[ing his] homepage" (Gonan 1997).

This reaction suggests how at least some segment of O'Connor's fans use her music. It is based on and informed by fans' appropriation of a set of social and political values which they find articulated in her music. This ideology creates an "affective alliance", a term Grossberg uses to describe the ways groups of fans invest their energy into rock and roll, which, in this case, is a "vision to be achieved" and a "rejection of dominant culture" (Grossberg 1992: 171).[17] For devoted fans, this ideology, mutually created by fans, O'Connor, and media, yet individually appropriated, is as important as any other aspect of her music.

Seeing her music career as part of her life's journey, O'Connor has left the "angry, cathartic songs" of ten years ago to take up what the Boston Globe calls "celebrating motherhood – and the feminine principle" (Morse 1997). Contrary to the popular mainstream's clamor for continuous hits, O'Connor simply states, "I don't want to be a pop star. I just want to sing...and make enough of a living to look after my children" (Morse 1997). Rock music has been a means to express conflict and tension; O'Connor has used music in this way, but has developed beyond that. Despite the fact that her political statements are still controversial, her desire is to be a force of

healing rather than conflict. As she states, "I want to use my voice for soothing not just myself, but other people" (Morse 1997).

Perhaps this is what is hampering her mainstream popularity. The audience she initially attracted was more in sync with her earlier period of angst than this "new, more introspective O'Connor" (Farley 1997a). Even current fans who have written in on the Internet admit they are more attracted to the first albums. It is plausible that this particular expression of herself -- as mother -- is not as familiar to the general rock audience and makes a certain portion of her audience uncomfortable. I personally believe the decline in popularity is mostly due to the lack of variety in song structure and the way O'Connor uses her voice on the latest album. Melodies in particular are limited and repetitive to the point of being mundane.

As a check to the apparent negative reception from a portion of her audience, I should mention the Toronto Sun's characterization of her recent tour as a "Triumphant Return" (Grant 1997) and that in a recent interview with Rolling Stone, the interviewer noted that O'Connor "seems to be experiencing a rebirth with her critically acclaimed new EP, *Gospel Oak*, and the ecstatic reception to her recent American tour with a mostly female band" (Goldman 1997: 126).[18]

Conclusion

Sinead O'Connor's means of articulating style is through an ideology of authenticity. This ideology extends through her image, her Irish and political identity, lyrics, vocal style, and performance gestures. It is confirmed by both the negative and positive reception of her audience as shown above. While the concept of authenticity is not foreign to rock's discourse, the particular way O'Connor develops her musical style through this ideology does present alternative ways of operating within this discourse.

As O'Connor herself admits, her music is like a life diary -- it is the music chronicles of her life journey so far (Graham 1995, Morse 1997). The presentation of

personal experiences in her music and in the press coupled with her unique, expressive vocal style gives her music an air of authenticity which is perhaps the most defining factor of her style, and has had much to do with her success. As early as the 1960s, the notion of authenticity has been used as a basis for value judgments about a given music (Frith 1988: 165). There is a certain respect granted for perceived honest self-expression which lends credibility to an artist within the rock community (Shuker 1994: 7).[19]

As mentioned, O'Connor's vocal style has a great deal to do with perpetuating the ideology of authenticity and self-expression that is central to her general music style. In the first two albums, O'Connor uses her voice in a similar way to punk vocalists, particularly in her use of vocal excesses such as yelling, whispering, moaning, howling, and snarling, as well as in successive wide interval leaps. This vocal style evokes notions of "authentic delivery" and along with the unique vocal mannerisms mentioned previously presents O'Connor as a voice of personal integrity. Even on the later albums, her voice continues this tradition of self-expression, now of a more gentle, nurturing maternal figure.

O'Connor's political convictions serve as another aspect of a style which contribute to a perception of authenticity. Though her political voice is easily found in press interviews and media coverage, it is also revealed in her music. Examples of songs with direct political messages are mentioned previously, but her political identity is also revealed apart from lyrics. The Irish folk song influences found in her music articulate political meaning because much of her political views revolve around the conflicts of the Irish people, which she also uses as a parallel to personal conflict and trauma. I have suggested that these influences include strophic form and instrumentation as well as direct use of traditional Irish folk song and dance.

Through the variety of postures O'Connor adopts in her music, she extends the perception of a woman's identity in rock, pushing at boundaries of image and musical form. She exemplifies a postmodernism's acceptance of "a number of discourses" – that of rocker, political critic, and mother – "each of which opens up new possibilities

for positioning self" (McRobbie 1994: 63). Through lyrics and vocal style we have seen O'Connor present herself as strong and aggressive, vulnerable and submissive, or nurturing and loving. She can simultaneously be a lover, a gentle mother, a pained victim, and a political anarchist. The various ways of presenting the female identity -- particularly as victim, mother, and aggressive lover -- has been mirrored in the Riot Grrrl movement[20] with bands such as Hole, Babes in Toyland, and L7.

Probably the most challenging aspect to traditional notions of rock music is O'Connor's identity as a mother. This identity is dominant in the last two albums in terms of lyrical content, album iconography, instrumentation, and formal structures (i.e., lullabies). In accepting and expressing her change and growth in becoming a mother, O'Connor also challenges perceptions of rock as "youth" music (see Frith's *Music for Pleasure* – 1981), opening up rock to act as a site of exploring the feelings and responsibilities of parenthood rather than limiting it to feelings of pleasure, fun, rebellion, and anger. Grossberg specifically identifies the locus of rock 'n' roll as the "ability to have fun", with youth being one of the major "axes" on which it is found (Grossberg 1992: 171, 173). Simon Frith argues that rock 'n' roll is about the organization of pleasure and leisure resulting in a strong connection with youth in particular (Grossberg 1992: 165).

Rock music, however, can benefit from a more mature perspective. Stan Denski suggests the "gradual erosion of the earlier notion of popular music as 'youth music'" is an instigator for "the diversity and fragmentation characteristic of today's popular music" (Denski 1992: 44). The rock audience now contains people of all ages. Recognizing this fact, Negus chides writers of popular music for the overemphasis on the young people who make up the rock audience (Negus 1996: 32).

O'Connor is quite vocal about the fact that as she ages, and gains life experience -- most importantly being a mother to two children -- she is maturing, and her more recent material is a reflection of this. In fact, the music is so connected with her own personal history that she prefers to omit past material which does not co-exist with her sense of moving forward. She will not perform songs from her debut album,

explaining that "some of those songs are a bit childish". She even admits, "I hate them. It's like reading my diary" (Morse 1997). Nor will she perform the hit that made her an unwilling superstar, "Nothing Compares 2 U", because "the commercial world is not something I really wanted" (Morse 1997). This is a rather unusual stance to take, considering that a rock artist typically always includes his/her history -- particularly, the hits that made him/her famous -- along with present material in a concert tour. O'Connor urges her audience (at least in concert) to take part in her life development, directing fans to view her songs as representations of the particular space she understands herself to inhabit, which involves her own personal growth.

Sinead O'Connor is, of course, not alone in "growing up". Indeed, rock music is now over forty years old, and the audience of rock has grown up with it. Rock performers who have remained active for over twenty years, such as the Rolling Stones, Neil Young, Bruce Springsteen, Lou Reed, Fleetwood Mac, Patti Smith, and Sting, to name only a few, have also gone through stylistic development and change. Referring to Flanagan's interviews with prominent musicians in their forties and fifties, Denski deduces, "for many of these [senior] performers, finding new ways to fit adult subjects into rock 'n' roll's self-consciously adolescent tradition is a pressing concern" (Denski 1992: 44). While this may be true, there is more change in O'Connor's music – its actual aural and structural properties, thematic material, and the overall tone has demonstrated such a drastic development that parallels what is presented of her own life – in ten years than there has been in twenty-five years in the music of the likes of Bruce Springsteen, Keith Richards, or Stevie Nicks.

V. Conclusion – Extending the Boundaries

The women in this study are successful rock artists at least partly because they are able to articulate the various elements of their style through a cohesive ideology. Sarah McLachlan as comforting bohemian poetess invites us into her emotional soundscapes through an ideology of earth mother/goddess. The core of Sheryl Crow's musical style resides in her rhythm and blues roots, which she perpetuates through her image, lyrics, and the sonic qualities of her music. Her distinctiveness in rock music can be found in the way she dialogues ideologically and musically with other musical styles, particularly country and jazz. Sinead O'Connor has created a style which rests on the apparent "fidelity of [her] music to her own experiences" (White 1996a: 58). This ideology of authenticity is the essential core which informs elements such as vocal style, performance gestures, musical form, image, and political identity.

These artists are forces in rock music because they demonstrate an ability to stretch and redefine boundaries. McLachlan acts as a model for the independent and unique female voice. The physical qualities of her vocal style, the contour of her melodic lines, and her poetic way with lyrics is distinctive in its perpetuation of a female, almost maternal, voice which provides a somewhat alternative sound in rock music. McLachlan's ability to act as a figurehead for Lilith Fair demonstrates the force of the ideology of earth mother/goddess perpetuated at an event which is in itself a symptom of the women-in-rock "movement", a movement which is showing no signs of slowing down. Crow instates "femininity" into rock through the discourse of rhythm and blues. She accomplishes this by offering an alternative, feminine approach to image and lyrics in a style which has been male domain. O'Connor pushes even harder at rock's boundaries. She inserts the figure of mother, which McLachlan hints at, into rock's discourse, displaying a social way of being in rock which has been marginalized, but is now being taken up by many women in rock, as in many career fields, as a legitimate status. O'Connor has also provided new models for musical structure by incorporating strophic and free form which is based on her dramatic vocal style to

sustain interest, aspects derived from her preoccupation with her Irish heritage as well as her intense, dramatic vocal style.

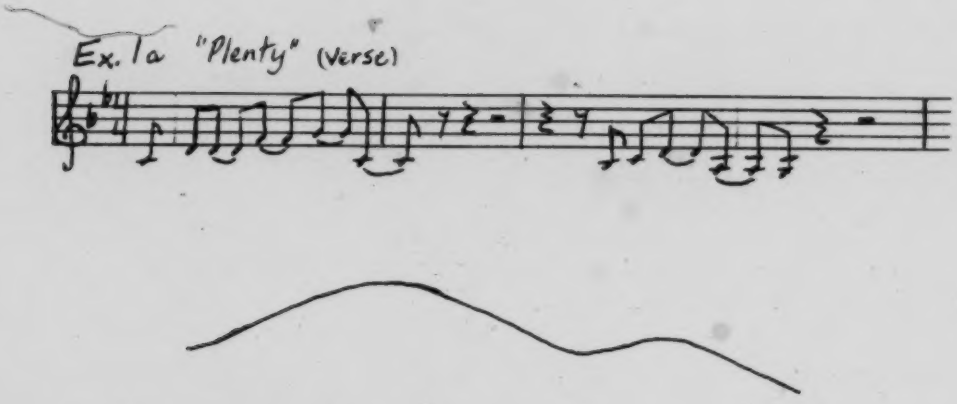
Finally, these women are also successful for the same reason as their male counterparts: they write songs that their audiences appreciate, they have an image that piques interest, and they put on a good show.

Through the effective combination of a particular ideology and musical aesthetic, the three artists presented in this study exemplify what is possible for rock music to encompass. Their success, as well as the success of many other female artists, may be indicative of a critical moment in rock's history where its discourse is expanded, its ideology is confronted and reinvented, and its meanings are multiplied. As the audience engages with these artists in the process of articulation of musical meaning, it also engages with these new representations as alternative ways of being within rock (Middleton 1990: 11).

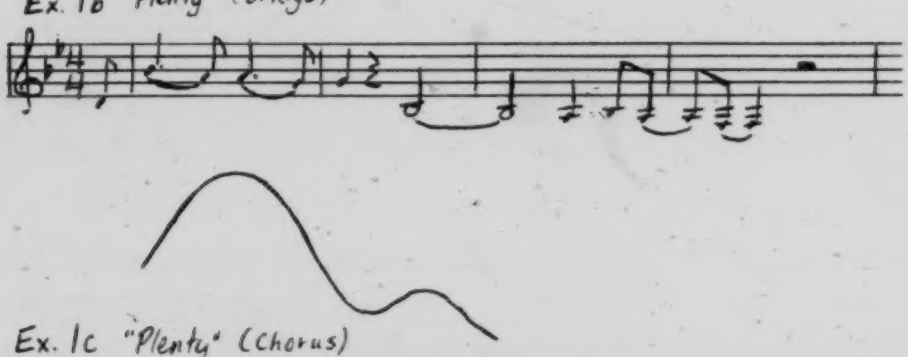
Though some would suggest that rock music cannot be done by women as well as men (Yuzwalk 1993: 87), I would argue that as more women "do rock", rock may become something different than it was in its primarily masculine past, challenging perceptions of what is acceptable in its discourse. Women may not wish to "do rock" in the way it was done before. They do, however, offer a new rock aesthetic, one informed by the distinctiveness of female voices, voices which are breaking out of marginalization and gaining momentum.

Musical Examples

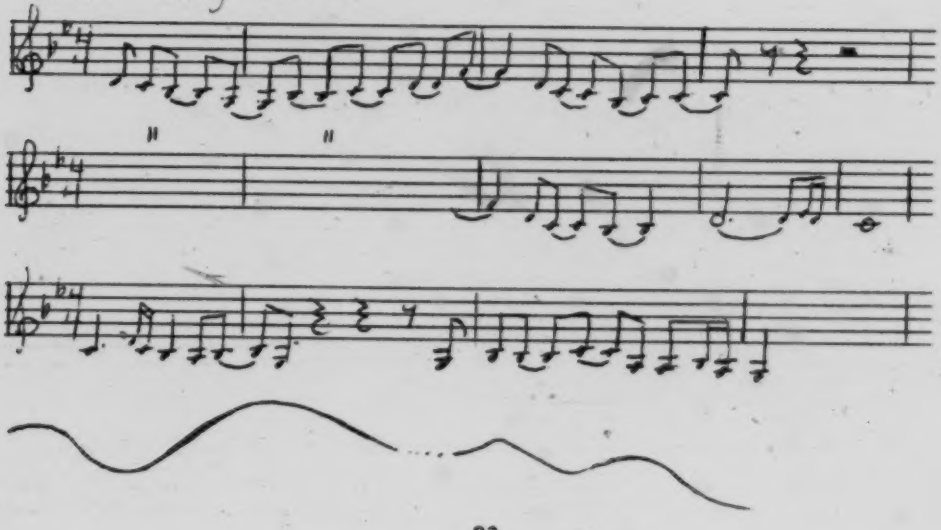
Ex. 1a "Plenty" (Verse)



Ex. 1b "Plenty" (bridge)

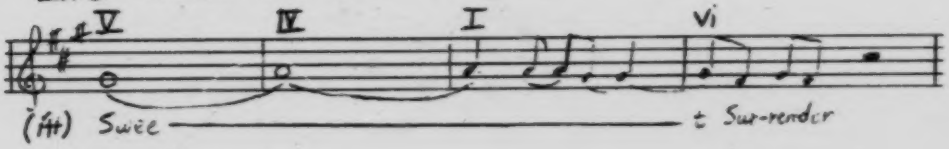


Ex. 1c "Plenty" (Chorus)

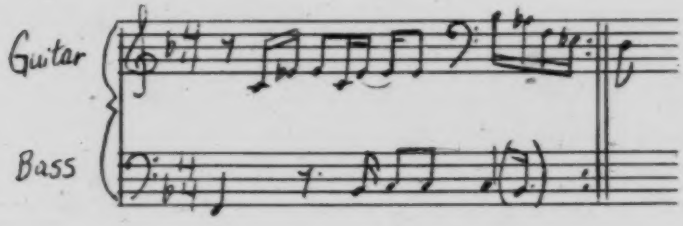


Ex. 2 "Witness" (built around the minor)

Ex. 3 "Sweet Surrender" (Bars 1-4 of chorus)

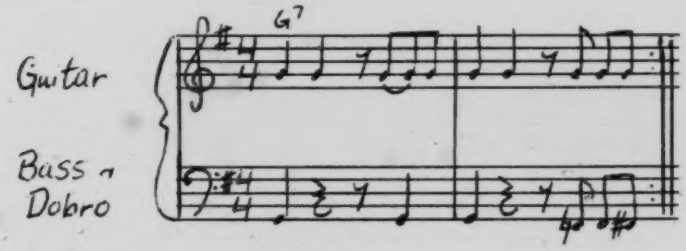


Ex 4 "Maybe Angels"

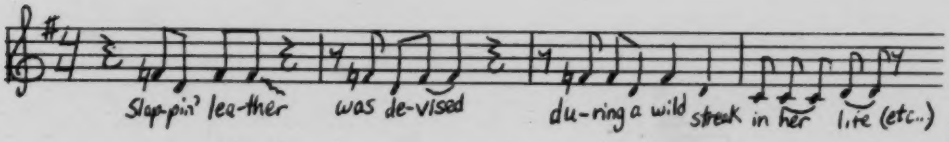


Ex. 5 "Can't Cry Anymore"

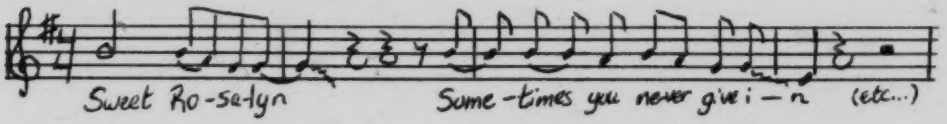
Ex. 6 "Sweet Rosalyn"



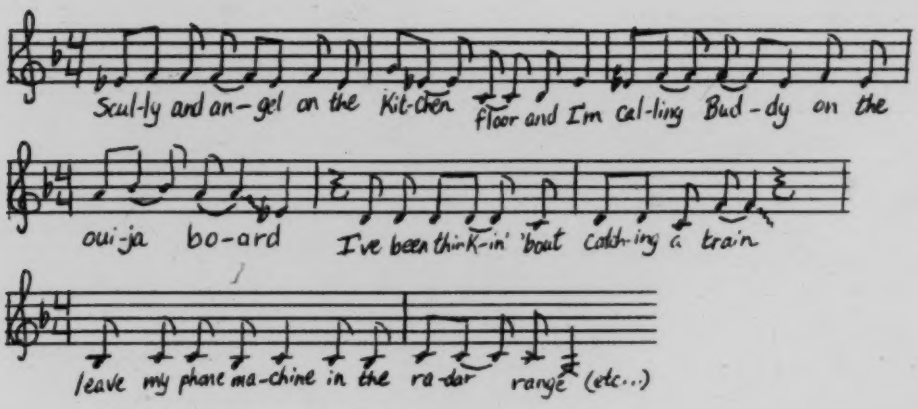
Ex. 7a "Sweet Rosalyn" (verse)



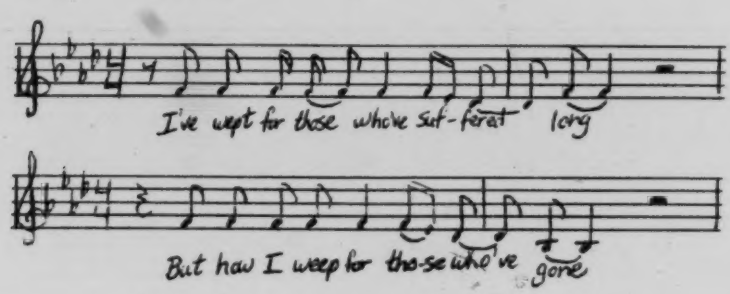
Ex. 7b "Sweet Rosalyn" (chorus)



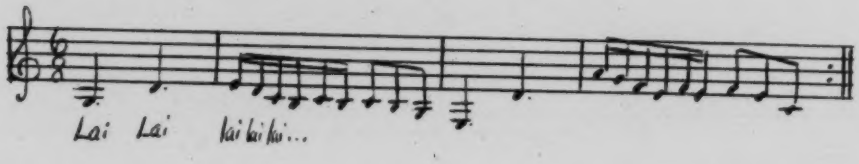
Ex. 8 "A Change" (verse)


Scul-ly and an-gel on the Kit-chen floor and I'm cal-ling Bud-dy on the
oui-ja bo-ard I've been think-in' 'bout catch-ing a train
leave my phone ma-chine in the ra-dar range (etc...)

Ex. 9 "Redemption Day" (verse)

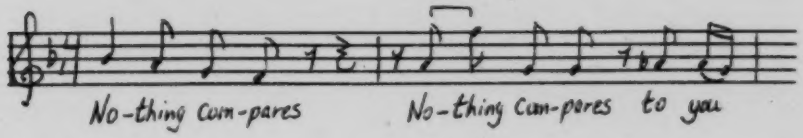


Ex. 10 "Just Like U Said it would B"

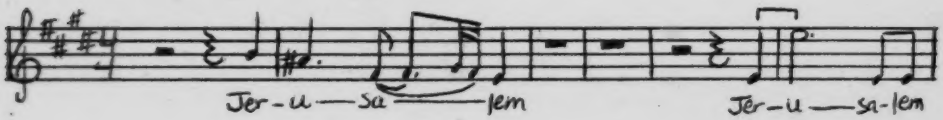


Ex. 11 "Never Get Old"

Ex. 12 "Nothing Compares 2U" (chorus)

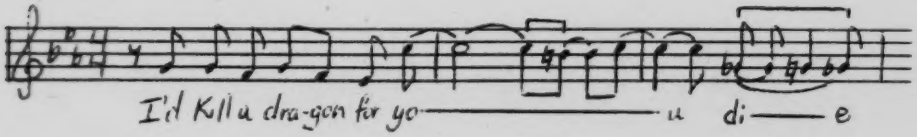


Ex 13 "Jerusalem" (chorus)

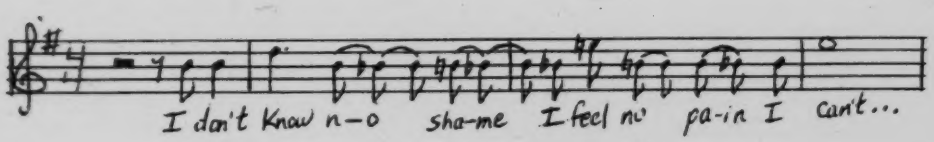


Ex.14a "Troy"

Ex. 14b "Troy"



Ex.15 "MandinKa" (bridge)



Endnotes

1. The creation of style can also involve the music industry as much as the artist. The Who was one of many bands whose musical style was directed in a particular way and whose image was dictated by their managers. In the case of McLachlan, O'Connor, and Crow I did not find any evidence to indicate the interference of management was a significant factor.

2. The early Police made deliberate attempts to meld punk and mainstream rock (Sutcliffe1993: 20-21). Their double-sided single, "Can't Stand Losing You/Dead End Job (released September 1978), featured a man hanging himself, expressing the sense of nihilism and disillusionment with dominant culture.

3. This was also observed by Lucy Whitman a year later. She further pointed out that women were expressing their own experience, rather than "mere myths of femininity" and suggests that women were finding new ways of expressing themselves both musically and lyrically (Whitman 1981: 8).

4. An exception to this is the black female vaudeville artists in the 1920's to 1940's , later called the early "classic blues" singers (eg., Bessie Smith, Billy Holiday).

5. Men have also been involved in androgyny and "gender-bending". The "glam" or "glitter" rock of such male acts as David Bowie and the New York Dolls in the 1970s flaunted conventional masculine poses with their androgynous images. The treatment of sexual identity through androgyny has continued with Boy George in the 1980s. More recently, "Heterosexual Man" (1993), a song by the male rock band The Odds, proudly states, "I'm a Heterosexual Man" while the video for this song features the members in cross-dress.

6. This is not to undermine my contention, however, that lyrics are an important part of a song.

7. By "blues and roots-oriented" rock, I am referring to rock which derives from early blues. This manifests itself in the use of the blues scale (major scale with flattened third and seventh degrees) and the twelve-bar blues form. "Bluesy" rock is guitar-driven and is also defined by a certain "feel", and in rhythm and blues, a "groove", which is almost impossible to explain (although "groove" usually indicates "riff") (Plant 1995: 113, 125). For a more in-depth look at sub-categories of rock music see Robert Plant's introduction to his informative history *Rock & Roll: An unruly history*, and to the chapter entitled, "Crossroads" which discuss the various trajectories of blues (p.113-127).

Endnotes (cont'd)

8. Rhythm and blues, a "cousin" to blues, has its source in gospel music. It takes the eight-bar form of pop and gospel rather than the twelve-bar blues form. It is "good-time dance music" as opposed to "trouble blues" (Shaw 1978: xvi) and its attitude was more hopeful and excited than one of resignation and despair. For further reading please see the introduction to *Honkers and Shouters* (Shaw 1978).

9. "Taste culture" is a term coined by Herbert Gans who used it to refer to "the set of cultural strata in a society that roughly parallels the social class strata of that society" (Schwictenberg 1992: 139). It can be broken down into three major dimensions: demographics, including age, gender, race, region and religion; aesthetics, including certain elements that "underlie and highlight a particular sound" as well as iconography; and political, which has to do with the relationships among the various participants of rock music's mediation.

10. Of course, this photograph has sex appeal and could be seen as treating the body as a sexual object. In light of the other aspects of Crow's music and image, however, I believe using sex appeal is consistent with her male counterparts such as Rod Stewart, Mick Jagger, and Robert Plant.

11. The treatment of women in lyrics is another departure from the rhythm and blues tradition of the Rolling Stones. Some examples include "Under My Thumb" which talks about control over a woman and "Yesterday's Papers" and "My Obsession" which "depict women as objects" handling them in a "ruthless, impersonal manner" (Hibbard 1983: 92).

12. This was confirmed to me recently, when I was asked about this current project. When I mentioned that one of the women in the study was Sinead O'Connor, the person paused for a moment, and then replied, "Isn't that the one who shaved her head and said obscene things about the Pope?"

13. Lull describes a "hook" as comprising of "certain melodic components (riffs or choruses) which catch the attention of the public". It has the ability to "capture and hold the interest of the listeners" (Lull 1992: 4).

14. The phonograph recording is either old and scratchy or produced to sound old and thereby, authentic.

Endnotes (cont'd)

15. Punk music's icon, Patti Smith, stated the following about her band in a 1978 interview: "'We're not like a male band, in that the male process of ecstasy in performance is starting here' – Smith mimed jerking at the base of an imaginary giant phallus – 'and building and building until the big spurt at the end. We're a feminine band, we'll go so far and peak and then we'll start again and peak, over and over. It's like an ocean'" (Reynolds and Press 1995: 356).

16. In her performance of this lengthy piece in concert, O'Connor was able to sustain the intensity solely through the use of her voice and acoustic guitar.

17. One should here recall the reviewer recently mentioned, who scorned the "right-wing" contingency.

18. At the time of this writing, O'Connor is also slated to perform in the 1998 Lilith Fair, along with Sheryl Crow and, of course, Sarah McLachlan.

19. This notion of authenticity was central to the punk movement in the 1970s and resurfaced again in the 1980s with Bruce Springsteen (Frith 1988: 165).

20. The Riot Grrrl movement began in Olympia, Washington and Washington D.C. as a female counterpart to the mostly male indie rock activity which has taken place there. Riot Grrrl is a female underground network which produces fanzines, stages gigs, forms bands, runs clubs, organizes cinema events, and hands out flyers to promote their bands and events (Evans 1993: 14). This network is intended to open communication and offer musical opportunities to girls who feel excluded and/or intimidated by males in rock music. The bands which are associated with Riot Grrrl carry the "do-it-yourself" ethos and the shock tactics of punk music, and address specifically female issues through music which is typically simple in terms of chord progressions and melody, loud, and angst-ridden.

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Appendix

Sarah McLachlan was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1968. She grew up in a caring home with two other siblings and studied classical guitar, piano, and voice. In high school she began playing in a New Wave band and after one year of art school, was offered a recording contract with the independent label Nettwerk in Vancouver. She accepted the offer, moving to Vancouver where she still lives today. She married her drummer, Ash Sood in 1997 (Mundy 98: 40). McLachlan's music could be categorized as "soft" rock, utilizing traditional rock instrumentation (bass, drum kit, keyboards, rhythm guitar, and solo guitar) but with less insistent drive than classic rock.
Discography: *Touch* (1988) Nettwerk; *Solace* (1991) Nettwerk; *Fumbling Towards Ecstasy* (1994) Nettwerk; *The Freedom Sessions* (1995) Nettwerk (contains eight new versions of previously-released songs); *B-Sides, Rarities and Other Stuff* (1997) Nettwerk; *Surfacing* (1997) Nettwerk.

Sheryl Crow began her musical career in Los Angeles as a respected back-up singer in 1986, singing for artists such as Don Henley, Stevie Wonder, and Michael Jackson. She grew up, however, in Missouri where she was born in 1962 to parents who were amateur musicians. She studied guitar and piano as a child, played in high school rock bands, studied classical piano at the University of Missouri, [and] taught music" (Hamilton 1997: 108). Musically, Crow follows a predominantly rhythm and blues stylistic practice, incorporating other musical influences such as jazz and country.
Discography: *Tuesday Night Music Club* (1993) A&M.; *Sheryl Crow* (1996) A&M..

Sinead O'Connor was born in 1966 in Ireland in a Dublin suburb. Her parents separated when she was eight years old and O'Connor, along with five siblings, was raised by her abusive mother who died in a car accident in 1985. At fourteen, she was sent to a reform school (Norris 1998), but ran away to Dublin at age sixteen where she began singing (particularly Bob Dylan covers) in local pubs and joined a local band (London Times 1997). She was offered a recording contract at eighteen years of age and moved to London where she still resides. In 1987 she had a son, Jake, and was married briefly to his father two years later. She moved back to Ireland for nine months in 1993 where she studied piano and singing (Goldman 1997: 126). Three years later in London she had daughter Roisin. O'Connor's music could be placed in an alternative rock category, her music showing diverse influences from dance pop to guitar-driven rock in the earlier albums, and moving towards Celtic folk music in the later albums.
Discography: *The Lion and the Cobra (1987)* Ensign Records/Chrysalis; *I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got* (1990) Ensign Records/Chrysalis; *Am I Not Your Girl?* (1992) (an album covering other artist's work including standard songs from musicals)

Ensign Records/Chrysalis; *Universal Mother* (1994) Ensign Records/Chrysalis; *So Far...The Best Of...Sinead O'Connor* (1997) Ensign Records/Chrysalis; *Gospel Oak* (1997) EMI/ Chrysalis.